THE 'SAIL' OF 'THE 'SILVER' BARGE'

FLORENCE BONE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HIDDEN HIGHWAY
THE WONDERFUL GATE
A ROSE OF YORK
THE BROWNIE'S BOX

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY
4, Bouverie Street, London, E.C.

THE SAIL OF THE SILVER BARGE ·

WITH TANGLED CURLS LAY PAMELA TEMPEST, AS FAST ASLEEP AS IF SHE WERE IN HER OWN CAMP BED AT THE COTTAGE.

[*See page 192.*

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AUTHOR OF "THE HIDDEN HIGHWAY," "A ROSE OF YORK," "THE WONDERFUL GATE," ETC.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

THE SHIP THAT NEVER CAME IN 9

CHAPTER II

THE FAMILY BOAT EMBARKS 27

CHAPTER III

THE YEARS BETWEEN 46

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS 64

CHAPTER V

PAMELA BESIEGES THE HALL 83

CHAPTER VI

IN AND OUT OF DIFFICULTIES 97

CHAPTER VII

A WONDERFUL STORY 118

CHAPTER VIII

THE GILT BIRDCAGE 129

Contents

CHAPTER IX

PAGE

THE FAMILY SHIP TURNS HOME 140

CHAPTER X

MISS ELIZABETH SPEAKS OUT 152

CHAPTER XI

THE PICTURE AGAIN 163

CHAPTER XII

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PAMELA 175

CHAPTER XIII

THE LOST LAMB 187

CHAPTER XIV

A JOURNEY TO THE SOUTH 201

CHAPTER XV

SAINT MARTIN'S SUMMER 213

The Sail of the Silver Barge

CHAPTER I

THE SHIP THAT NEVER CAME IN

Be useful where thou livest, that they may
Both want and wish thy pleasing presence still,
Kindness, good parts, great places, are the way
To compass this. Find out men's wants and will
And meet them there. All worldly joys go less
To the one joy of doing kindnesses.

—*George Herbert.*

"ELINOR! Do listen, Elinor. I want to ask you something."

"When don't you, Pam," said Elinor somewhat wearily. "You are one great interrogation mark."

Pamela wrinkled up her white forehead under the crown of bright hair, which Antony called red, but which would some day darken into the colour of beech leaves in the sun.

"I don't understand what you mean," she said. "You see you are nineteen and I'm seven. You've got a bigger understanding than I've got."

Elinor laughed and put down the book in which she had been so deep.

"I don't think I have, Pam," she said. "Just now I feel as if I didn't understand anything, but it's a shame to worry you. What do you want to know?"

"What's a barge?" inquired Pam. "I've asked Hannah, and all she said was, 'Barge me no barges, Miss Pam, if you please. I've all I can do a-launching ships, and more, without a-dragging of 'em home again, which is quite a different cup of tea.' She made it sound harder than ever, I think."

"I should think so," laughed Elinor. "Well, don't lose your dimples over it, girlie. A barge is a kind of ship, only it does not steam or anything of that kind. It mostly floats on a canal, and a horse pulls it along by a rope. The horse walks on the bank."

"Oh!" said Pam, much impressed. "And are they always made of silver?"

"Silver!" exclaimed Elinor. "I never heard of one being made of silver. They are mostly made of wood, and are very dirty-looking things too, full of coal, or something of that sort."

"It's puzzlinger and puzzlinger," said Pamela. "It was mother and dad were talking, and dad said: 'Unless the silver barge appears on the lake.' Then mummy sighed and laughed too. 'When our ship comes in, it will scarcely be the old fairy barge,' she said. And daddy—I think he got up and kissed her, and he said, 'It shall come in some day, or my name is not Roger Tempest.' Hannah came in with the tea then, so I came out from under the table, and mummy laughed again when she saw me and said I was a pixie—but I know what that means, it's

only a naughty fairy who's been where it has no business."

"And might safely be called Pam," said Elinor.

"But was there never any silver barge?" inquired Pam again.

"Why didn't you ask father what he meant?" said Elinor, trying to keep one eye on the page of her book. "There used to be very gay fine barges in days gone by when Elizabeth was Queen. They used to go up and down the Thames with the Queen and all the courtiers on board. They were all the colours of the rainbow, and perhaps some of them might have been silver, I don't know. But that kind has gone by for ever."

"Yet mightn't it come again? And was it the same Thames we see now from Westminster Bridge, with the clock tower looking down into the water, and that you go on for twopence to Battersea Park?"

"The very same, but it was clean and beautiful then."

"It's beautiful now sometimes, when the sun sets behind the towers, and makes it a sort of different. It looks as though it might have fairy tales in it then, deep down below, with silver barges and all sorts of things. Perhaps when our ship comes in, Elinor, it'll be different from other people's. Perhaps it will be a silver barge, if theirs isn't."

"More than likely," agreed her elder sister. "Considering ours never comes in at all, we might as well suppose it will be a superior article when it does. Ours only goes out as yet, Pam, and a precious lot of pushing off it takes at that. I doubt if it will ever float of itself, or come back laden with any kind of good things. I haven't much faith in those ships that

sail out of sight. They only come back as argosies to those who could well do without them."

Elinor was speaking to herself, and little Pam's attention had wandered to the favourite doll she was putting to bed on the floor. The January dusk was creeping slowly into the room where firelight had sunk to a red glow, and filling it with shadows of old things and old thoughts that only come at dusk.

It was a charming room, in spite of the fact that it was very shabby, and was only a little sitting-room in a Bloomsbury flat. Beyond the plane-trees and the smutty sparrows who did their best to sing cheerfully in a London square, rose the black and frowning buildings of the British Museum. The old square was quiet and possessed a garden where sometimes in May it was possible, before man's dust took the beauty out of God's trees, to fancy the distant country had come back again to London. Even now, on this January afternoon, a pert crocus was pushing a green blade out of the black soil. The cheery golden flower to come later did not look first to see what kind of a garden it had been planted in.

There were one or two beautiful things in the shabby sitting-room, though like itself they had long ago lost all the grandeur they once possessed. The Turkey carpet had lost its soft surface, but its colours had been blended by time and feet into a wonderful beauty. The old gate-table had a value which its owners did not know. The two carved Jacobean chairs would have been welcome in many a collector's home, as would the oak chest where the family mending was kept. But the chief treasure of the house hung on the wall above the dying fire.

The Ship that Never Came In

It was a picture—not very large, and at the first glance rather dim in its delicate colouring. But every one who stood and looked at it long enough saw something rare and haunting in the face before them. It was a picture of the Madonna, Mary the mother of Jesus, as she must have looked when her eyes rested on her Wonderful Child, as a babe in the stable, or as a boy in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth.

It did not show her as a great queen or as a figure to be worshipped, as do some of the pictures far away in those great galleries of Italy. It showed her as a loving, suffering woman, with that in her eyes which meant sympathy instead of selfishness, loving-kindness for other people instead of happiness for herself. This was indeed a picture of the mother of Jesus, painted by an artist who surely knew in his own soul what sympathy meant.

But nobody knew who had painted this picture, that was one of the things that made it interesting. It was not a copy—everybody said that, and some people who looked at it said that it was certainly painted by one of the world's old masters, and that if Mr. Tempest would take it to Italy he might find it was worth a fortune.

He only looked dubious, and shook his head when they said so. Fortune had never come his way. Besides, he said, the picture was not his, it belonged to his wife, and she had said that only when their last loaf was eaten and the children were hungry, would she sell her beautiful Madonna.

Mrs. Tempest's father, long ago in another life about which her children knew nothing, had given that picture to his daughter. He had brought it from Italy—when

he was a young man himself—where he had found it and bought it in a dark old shop in the Via Condotti at Rome. Some people had laughed at it when he brought it home, but his little daughter had loved it from her childhood. So, when she was eighteen, he had given it to her, and very soon afterwards a great traveller had hinted at its value. It became a very precious treasure, and more so because the father who had given it to his daughter soon after went away to the land that is very far off.

Elinor looked up at the picture in the afternoon dusk and wondered for the thousandth time what its history was. And from that she began to wonder about her mother's girlhood in which this picture had played its part. Neither Elinor nor Antony nor little Pam knew any of those delightful stories which mothers tell about their childhood. They knew it had been spent in the country, and in a very different home from the Bloomsbury flat, but that was all they knew about it at all. She never seemed to care to answer questions about those old days, so Elinor never asked her any.

The girl knew no cousins of her own age, no indulgent aunts, no kind uncles or spoiling grandmother. She did not know that she had ever had any, but her parents' silence about it had cast a halo of mystery about probable relations that was very attractive to Elinor. She liked to dream of finding them suddenly one day, and to make up tales and histories belonging to them, in which their homes were palaces in the green country, and their lives like story-book lives. Elinor herself could remember no other home than London. Ever since she was old

enough to assist at the family councils, and know the family doings, she could only remember Bloomsbury streets, and London shops for a treat, a flat in a high shabby house that had seen better days, and a family purse which was never full enough for the needs it had to meet.

Her father was a newspaper man, who went out every night when other people came home to bed, to help to make up one of the great London dailies. As extra work he wrote articles that sometimes brought in welcome cheques, but at others fell to the bottom of the letter-box on their return journey with a plop. This meant short commons, mended boots, or old summer frocks to be washed and worn again.

Roger Tempest had once been full of ambition. There was a great book in his brain and his heart, but it had been such hard work to earn bread and butter, that his soul had got tired, and he had never had time to write it. But now, for a long time his back had ached as well as his soul. His hair was growing thin and grey, he stooped when he walked, and sometimes he could not write. A terrible fear had seized him when he coughed in the night and could not sleep. What would become of his children if his health failed and he could not go on?

The mainstay of the Tempest family was and always had been Hannah, who regarded them all as children together, and treated them accordingly. When she first came to live in their kitchen, Elinor and Antony did not know, for it was before either of them looked out through the bars of the nursery window. That she had once come from the country, she was always telling them, and although it was twenty years ago,

she had never laid down her arms against London dirt. It was she who kept cheerful, and scouted the mention of wages, when a newspaper came to grief one long cold winter, and for many months no other seemed to want Mr. Tempest's work. It was Hannah who said he would be glad in the end, and it was she who was proved right. Since that day better ones had dawned, and Elinor had been able to go to the High School, and pass a brilliant exam. But even Hannah shook her head behind the kitchen door when she heard her master cough, and nobody was looking.

"That's a churchyard cough if ever I hear one," she remarked aloud to the row of shining pans. "It ain't a case for barley-water, master's isn't. It's a new climate he ought to go to—or belike he'll go to another world."

Hannah wiped away a tear on the kitchen towel, but she was not one to let the grass grow under her feet. She had not served her mistress for twenty years for nothing, and it was Hannah who first put into her head that the wear and tear of Bloomsbury and the London fogs must be left behind for a time if they would not be left for ever.

"Here's daddy coming home, Elinor," said Pam, when she had sung her doll to sleep. "He's just crossing the square, and the lamplighter is behind him. Wouldn't you like to be a lamplighter—except when it's raining? I would. It must be so jolly twinkling in those little lights at the top of a long stick."

"Father! coming home at this time—what can have happened?" cried Elinor, springing up, and going to

the window. "It's not five o'clock, and I know he meant to stop at the office all night without coming home. Is mother in, Pam?"

"No, she's gone to meet Antony, to buy him a new hat," said Pamela, who always knew everybody's doings. "What do you s'pose is the matter?"

"Nothing, of course," said Elinor hastily, though her tone belied her words. "Don't be so curious, Pam, it's growing on you. A curious woman is a horrible thing."

"I shan't never be a woman for lots and lots of years yet," answered Pam in an injured tone. "Elinor——"

But Elinor was out of the room, and half-way down the stairs. She had seen a bent, worn, disappointed man coming across the square garden in the light of the lamp. It was no small thing that had brought her father home.

She met him at the top of the stairs, and took his coat in silence, for Elinor knew when not to ask questions. For the first time she noticed how ill he looked, how thin his hands were, as he rubbed them together when he came into the room, and looked round for his wife.

"Mother is out," said Elinor cheerfully, poking the fire into a little blaze, and recklessly throwing on wood. "But she will be in presently, and you would like tea, wouldn't you? I'll just ring the bell, and make you some toast."

"Daddy, why have you come home so——" began Pam, but Elinor marched her out of the room.

"Oh, those questions of yours," she said. "I don't know where they will land us some day, I'm sure."

"They are not naughty," objected Pamela, her big

brown eyes filling with tears. "Can't a child ask her own father why he's come home?"

"Of course she can," laughed Elinor. "Now sit down on this little stool, and you shall make the toast. Hannah, father has come home. He would like some tea——"

"Yer pa's come home, Miss Elinor! And he was to stay the night! Mark my words, love, it's the beginning of the end."

Hannah liked to talk in mysteries, but Elinor shivered. The end of anything sounded both unheard-of and impossible to a girl of nineteen, with a heart full of hopes, and all the world before her. She said nothing as she helped Hannah, but put out the daintiest china that the little household boasted, and carried a little green mug of snowdrops on to the middle of the tea-table. Her father looked at them sadly from the seat into which he had thrown himself by the fire. To Elinor they were the harbingers of hope. To him they were the whispering messengers from long ago Springs.

A quick light step came up the stairs, followed by a school-boy's, and Elinor's mother entered the room with her son Antony, a delicate lad of thirteen who had inherited his father's constitution, and found it hard work to learn his lessons in London. He threw off his cap, and seized one of Pam's rampant curls.

"Hullo, miss!" he cried, "been setting the Thames on fire, or what."

"Only making toast," replied Pam promptly. "But oh, Tony, once there was barges on the Thames, sailing up and down, did you know? With queens in them, and why not again? That's what I want to know—perhaps silver barges full of fairy things."

"That kind of ship doesn't come in now, my child," said a deep voice from the armchair in the dark. "And yet you may live to see your ship come in, little Pam, though your daddy never will. Nell! My cough's done for me. It's all up with the *Daily Lantern*. The chief told me, kindly enough I must own, that they can't keep me. They must have a stronger man and I shall have to go."

"Roger! Oh——" for a moment, taken thus unawares, the brave wife faltered. She had fought such a gallant fight for her little family in the years that had gone. Latterly she had thought her little boat was making headway, while all the time it was heading for the storm which had broken over it, and left it but an old derelict on a barren shore.

"Yes, this is what I've brought you to—and after all these years."

Mrs. Tempest knelt down before the hearth, and stirred the fire. She took up the little brush and made it tidy. She looked with approving eyes at the tea-table, for she was one of those who made a home wherever she went.

"I married you for better and for worse," she said. "You don't regret it, do you? I'm almost glad of this, Roger."

"Glad! you don't know what it means then."

"Oh, yes, I do. It means we'll take out that money from the bank that you made last year, and go away in search of health. I am sure we shall find it, and I should never have dragged you away from the office if you had the chance to stay. And such a good opportunity it will be for you to write your great book among the snows of Switzerland. It will

have the breath of the hills in it, and you shall finish it in Italy."

The tired man shook his head.

"That book has gone from me," he said.

"Oh, no, it hasn't—with the Alps and me to help you. Don't you long for the moment when you look into the clouds before Lucerne, and lo, they are not clouds, but eternal snows, real and uplifting and for ever. Why, I am talking in allegories—your plain, practical wife. The clouds of life are just like that. Elinor, light the gas, will you, dear? I want to see if your father hasn't a glimpse of those snows in his eyes."

"Yes," said Pam, from her seat on the rug. "He has, and his cheeks are quite red. He looks quite a new kind of daddy from when he came in."

The light that lit up the faint hope in the journalist's eyes fell too on his wife as she took her seat at the table and looked into the teapot. Mrs. Tempest's gown was shabby and old-fashioned, and her hat was one that had long ago seen its first and never expensive days. But she wore it with an air that some duchesses might have envied, and there was about her a certain nameless grace which had never been born in Bloomsbury. She had given to both Elinor and Pam the deep chestnut hair and big, dark eyes, which often said more than their tongues. And she had given them also the gallant bearing and brave hearts with which they faced their little world.

"Get up, little girl," she said to Pamela, "and find a chair, and pass daddy some of your toast. Our ship will come in yet, and be a laden one, too."

"Or a silver barge," added Pam.

The father and mother looked at each other with

a look deep in their eyes that belonged to the long ago in another place in which their children had no part.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Tempest. "Indeed, I think the silver barge is going to set sail at last from the horizon of dreams and will surely come to anchor some day."

As she spoke her mother smiled across at Elinor, who was looking gravely into the fire. She saw the anxiety behind her mother's brave words. She knew what it would mean to take the little store of money and go away to a foreign land. And she suspected what Antony and Pam did not dream, that they would have to stay behind. What would become of them, with only Hannah to stand between them and the world?

Her question was partly answered late that night, and in a way she did not expect.

She was lying in the moonlight wide awake in the room she shared with Pam. A new little silver crescent was looking in through the black, bare trees, and making even Bloomsbury mysteriously wonderful. The dim square garden was a place of dreams instead of a dingy plot of grass and a few dejected plane-trees. All the wonderful things that might happen but never did, seemed to come close to Elinor in the dark.

There was a tiny room beyond hers in which Hannah slept, and a door of communication between the two. Elinor thought it was the middle of the night when she heard a step in the room beyond and saw a light under the door. Then her mother's voice came clearly to her ears. She was evidently talking to Hannah, and Elinor could not hear all they said. She turned her face to the wall and tried not to listen,

but in spite of herself fragments of talk reached her which made her heart beat and her cheek grow crimson in the dark.

"If I leave them—I shall leave them with you and Elinor, and down at Nestlecombe—not here. You know all my troubles, Hannah—and all my secrets. What would you advise me to do?"

"Why, certainly, Miss Nell," said Hannah, going back to the name by which she had known her mistress in another life. "I *should* know your heart, seeing I wore a pinny and a red cotton frock that first day ye come wi' your father to my mother's cottage. It's a long time ago, ma'am, since you and me first was friends. And there's Jessamine Cottage—nobody could never take that from ye, and we know as it's empty. I could go down and get it ready for the children, and who knows what might happen? Maybe Miss Pam now—she's wonderful taking, for all her mischief."

Elinor could not hear what came between, and she was uncomfortably conscious that she might hear some secret that had been carefully guarded from her all her life. Yet what was she to do? Her mother knew of the dividing door. And this was her only chance to speak confidentially to Hannah.

"Yes," she heard her mother say. "My little Pam—my baby, she might work wonders. Jessamine Cottage would be a sweet little home—and there is my hundred a year fortunately; I could leave you that. Do you think you could make it do?"

Hannah sniffed.

"There's many a maid what's a lot more ornamental than what I am, Miss Nell, wi' all their starch and fal-

de-lals o' caps, what aren't caps at all to my way o' thinking; leastways, not coverin's for the head, which was what St. Paul recommended for a decent woman body—but I defy you to find a better manager, or one as knows more ways of making a halfpenny do the work o' three."

"Hannah!" said her mistress, and Elinor was sure that she laid her hand on the rough one that had toiled through the years for her and hers. "*Nobody* else could do it. I could not myself. But now that Tony has got this scholarship he may use it anywhere, and I should like him to go to the old school at Salisbury. I should like Elinor to live near the dear old place, and to know Nestlecombe as her own. I can think of no place so good in which to leave them. And after all these years it could not matter."

"There's no call whether it matters or not," said Hannah indignantly. "The cottage is yours, ma'am, and we ain't got a tax on air yet, not that it'd come very 'eavy on London."

"Poor little Pam will be able to smell the spring, at Nestlecombe, won't she, Hannah?" said Mrs. Tempest tenderly. "Oh, do you remember the apple-blossom in April? The village was a bower of pink scent. My children have been deprived of that."

"Well, it ain't too late. Remember it—I should just think I do. Why, wasn't it in the spring as Dick Raven telled me I reminded him of a washin' day—all clean clothes hanging to dry under apple blossom. He meant it for poetry, though ye wouldn't think it. Poor Dick! I wonder what's become of him. He was sore set of marrying me, but I never could bring myself to give myself up."

"And you might have been happy under the apple-blossom yet. I know you gave it up for me, Hannah."

"Well—there's winters as well as springs, ma'am. An' Dick Raven, he was fussy enough soundin' under the trees, but I hadn't never sampled him by the hearth when the chimley smoked. And besides—he'd his widowed mother, and though a decent body, I never could abide her, nor her me."

"Then it is settled that if we decide to send the children to Nestlecombe, you will stay with them at Jessamine Cottage?" said Mrs. Tempest, after some more talk which Elinor did not hear.

"Settled! I should think so indeed. I'm not so easy got rid of. You didn't mean to go for to give me a month's notice, surely—after all these years."

"I should as soon think of giving myself a month's notice."

"Then that's all right. Why, Miss Nell, what if—and ye never know. Miss Elinor now, she's the very livin' image o' what ye was that summer as Mr. Tempest come down and made a book out of it all."

"Ah! that summer—when I look back at it, Hannah, I call it the radiant summer in my heart. There have been better ones, but there has never been just such another as that."

"Well, the weather was wonderful fine to be sure—and hot. My! We don't have them summers now."

"No, we don't have such summers as that," echoed Mrs. Tempest.

"But we might have—down at the old place, ma'am, an' if some of the old names lies under the moss, why—there was a many of 'em as was more cantankerous than what was good for the world about 'em. That

kind o' thing can't be put up with for ever. Though for sure it's a'ways the worst tempers as lasts the longest. Seems like as if them as bottled 'em up burst theirselves wi' the effort. I wonder—I wonder now if old Mrs. Raven's give in yet. She was a-holdin' on to life wi' both hands and feet when last heard of by me."

"You do hear sometimes?"

"Just now and then at Christmas, but not always. I don't always tell you, Miss Nell. Not if ye're happy yerself. An' the Hall—it's just the same. Only older—just older and sadder."

"Like us all."

"Like them as lives shut up to their own feelin's—but not you, no, nor me, ma'am. There's a deal in life as I find interestin'. I never was one o' them as looked all the time inside and turned my jacket outwards. I'd sooner keep my bits o' troubles well buttoned up."

"Yes, and out of other people's way. You do that, Hannah."

"I learnt it from you, ma'am. When I see your brave face, I wasn't going to be shamed."

Elinor could hear her mother rise, as if she had been sitting on Hannah's bed. They parted with lower tones, and a sound like a sob. It seemed as though mistress and maid shook hands over a trust that was sacred to both and had in it no element of bargaining. It was one friend giving into the hand of another something very precious to herself.

For a long time after there was silence in the dark, Elinor lay awake and wondered about what she had heard and the things that were to happen. They were

evidently to go away—she and Antony and Pam, to that magic country of trees and downs of which they had heard so much from Hannah, so little from their mother.

But what was the mystery of the little Wiltshire village near the wonderful old dream city that was haunted by other days and other voices?

It was the place where Hannah had spent her youth, that was plain enough. But what had her mother to do with it all in the days that were lived before Elinor was born? Why did she speak of it in longing tones and sad accents that she would never have let Roger Tempest hear her use? And why did Hannah answer her in low tones, that understood, and that did indeed imply a mystery?

Elinor could not tell. She tossed on her pillow until she was hot and wakeful. She got up and looked from the window at the dark frowning museum. Ugly, dirty, even forbidding was its outside, but what a storehouse of treasure it was—yea, and of mystery which no man living could solve. There lay its charm to Elinor. And the same charm was creeping into her heart when she pictured Nestlecombe. Would that prove also a storehouse of treasure?

She looked at Pam, who stirred in her sleep and muttered: "The silver barge has set sail."

CHAPTER II

THE FAMILY BOAT EMBARKS

Fly idleness, which yet thou can'st not fly
By dressing, mistressing, and compliment,
If those take up thy day, the sun will cry
Against thee; for his light was only lent.
God gave thy soul brave wings; put not those feathers
Into a bed, to sleep out all ill weathers.

—*George Herbert.*

ELINOR awoke next morning with that sense of something having happened which is well known to us all. She lay still, trying to remember what it was, and then sprang out of bed so suddenly that she awoke Pam, who sat up and inquired if something were the matter.

"No! Only time to get up."

But Elinor's voice was somehow inspiring and suggested happenings. She herself felt that that wonderful thing called change was coming to the Bloomsbury flat, and it behoved her to be ready.

Elinor had not very long to wait. When Antony and Pam had gone to school their father departed for the last time to the newspaper office, and Hannah busy in the kitchen, Mrs. Tempest sat down with her eldest child in the sitting-room and told her the plans which she had formed. Elinor listened with deepening colour.

"I heard you talking to Hannah last night, mother," she said. "I couldn't help it—that door, you know."

Mrs. Tempest looked almost alarmed for a moment.

"Ah yes," she said. "I ought to have remembered it. I thought you would be asleep."

"I didn't hear any secrets," said Elinor with a laugh, and she fancied that a faint relief crossed her mother's face. It deepened the mystery that was taking hold of Elinor more strongly all the time.

"It will be heavenly to go to the country—to live near Salisbury, to see the places where George Herbert once walked and talked. It will be like a romance; but are you quite, quite sure you would not rather leave us in London?"

"I could not do that—I should be afraid," said Mrs. Tempest. "And both Antony and little Pam need country air. I trust them to you, Elinor, until we come back, when—I am sure your father will be better. Oh, he must be. The doctor held out great hopes of what even six months abroad might do."

"Of course he will be well, mother, and we shall all be happy, and the ship will come in. And you may trust me. I won't ever leave the children. I will do all I can—and we shall have Hannah."

"My brave, good girl," said her mother. "I don't know what I should do if some girls were my daughter. You ought to go to college now, but we can't manage it at present. I shall have to ask you to teach little Pam instead."

"It will be something to do, and keep me up to it. I shan't go back in a year—and I am only nineteen."

"You may learn some better things. I once loved

Salisbury, Elinor. I want you to know and love that dear old country-side while you are young. You know very little about my girlhood, but there are reasons for that. When I married your father he had nothing but his brains, and they were of no value to—my mother. She cast me off, and I have never wanted to talk about that time to my children, because it would mean perhaps hard things said by all of us. Don't ask me any questions, dear. Nestlecombe is the village where Hannah lived when she was a girl. She has often told you about it, and fortunately for us all, there is a little cottage there which my father presented to me when I was eighteen. It has furniture in it of a kind, though as it has often been let you may find it very dilapidated. We must go in a week or so, Elinor. I dare not trust the fogs and damp of February, or I would have gone down to Nestlecombe myself, but we must save every extra shilling too."

"There's no need for that," said Elinor. "But what about our things here?"

"We must sell them," said her mother firmly. "Those old chairs, the chests, and the bureau will be a great help. They are worth something."

"But not the picture?"

"No, not the picture. I shall keep my word about that. You must take it down to Nestlecombe with you, and there, if all else fails, you have my consent to sell it. Though, poor child, I don't know who would help you to do so."

"All else won't fail; if it does I will go out and work in the fields. I have always thought I would earn my living that way as a last resource. Are we

to have a sale? because if so, hadn't we better begin to overhaul things? There's not much time."

Mrs. Tempest agreed. The worst was over now, the tale told, and mother as well as children must look towards and trust the future.

Days full of business and yet very hard to go through followed this morning talk. The old chairs and tables, the family possessions, were marked by strange men into "lots." The rooms that had made a home for so long were dismantled, and as the day of the sale drew near there was even a huge ticket on little Pam's bed.

"Would I do for a lot, if mummy was willing to sell me?" she asked Elinor, as she trotted about helping her sister to fill the big old trunk that held the things which were going to Nestlecombe.

"You are worth your weight in gold, but I'm afraid nobody would risk it," said Elinor. "You are too much of a handful, Pam."

"I'm glad," said Pam. "Elinor—there's a gentleman talking to Hannah in the square. She's been out marketing an' she's got the biggest basket on her arm, with a cabbage sticking out at one end, and a very dirty root of celery at the other. She's pointing up here, and I think he's coming in."

"Oh dear," said Elinor, getting up from her knees.

That hardest of trials had begun. Strange women with keen faces for bargains, and second-hand dealers with dirty hands had begun to appear and look with more contempt than curiosity at the family things offered for sale. There are all sorts of shrines in hearts, and some of them are furnished with very commonplace things. To these loud-voiced strangers

there were surely not such things as shrines in the world.

But this man was different. Presently Hannah brought him upstairs to the sitting-room where Elinor was packing on the bare floor. There was not a chair to offer him, but he did not seem to mind, as he stood somewhat embarrassed, twirling his hat in his hands.

He was a young man, with dark hair and a very decided chin and eyes that looked at Elinor with diffidence, and yet with sympathy and something else. It seemed to say that he would be sorry to see a sister of his own in such a strait as this.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, "to intrude like this. But a client of ours—we heard you had a certain kind of Jacobean chair. She is an old lady, and—er—very persistent. She saw your sale of furniture advertised in *The Times*, and insisted that my firm should send somebody to look at this chair. I was coming to London, so I came."

The young man offered this explanation as if he owed Elinor an apology.

"I will show you the chair," she said brightly. "We have to get used to people coming to see our things. I believe it is a very good specimen."

"Oh! I say," stammered the young man. "I'm giving you an awful lot of trouble. I am sorry."

"Not at all."

There was an indefinable something in Elinor's manner which reminded people of her mother and was full of grace. It had its roots in an old-fashioned leisure, and Richard Elkin felt its charm as he followed her into her father's study.

He noted the books bound together in bundles

the few pictures, the writer's desk. Behind it all he saw perhaps more tragedy than was present to the girl. But her face darkened as she glanced towards the books that had been her own companions as well as her father's.

Richard saw the glance and knew what it meant, as she showed him the chair.

"Undoubtedly it is a beauty," he said. "Mrs. Devale would not be disappointed. The sale is to-morrow, I believe?"

"Yes."

"And we are going to sell all our things, because daddy is so poorly and the newspaper won't have him any longer," put in Pam. "But he is going far away to get better—and we are going to live in a cottage with Hannah. Binky is going too. He's my dog, and of course the license costs seven and six. But then Binky's one of the family—he's Binky Tempest same as we are. You couldn't leave one of the family out, could you, for seven and sixpence?"

"Of course not," agreed Richard Elkin heartily, looking down at Pam's charming earnest little face, but seeing her sister's. Elinor flushed, but she did not look embarrassed. Her own nature was simple and sincere and she had no feeling of shame. Moreover, she was well accustomed to little Pamela's disclosures.

"Perhaps you would like to see the other chair," she said, leading the way back to the sitting-room.

"Thank you, I—my word! Is this picture for sale? Excuse me—but isn't it awfully good? It must be a Botticelli, surely. There is worse in the Uffizi at Florence."

Elinor's eyes gleamed with pleasure.

"Father is always sure that at least it was by a pupil of Botticelli," she said, "and bears marks of his touch. My grandfather got it in Italy, in quite an obscure old shop, I believe. You understand pictures?"

"Well—er—scarcely. But my uncle does. He is a connoisseur. He would love to have this."

"It is not for sale. We cannot part with that."

"I am not surprised. I am sorry I asked. But I believe it is worth a fortune. You must pardon my asking, but is it insured? There is a gang of thieves about just now—clever fellows who understand art. And they get wind of things like this."

Elinor stiffened ever so slightly.

"We have always taken good care of our picture," she said. "I don't think we shall lose it."

"Well! Perhaps not. I beg your pardon. I shall hope to bid for the chair to-morrow—and to pay a high price, for it should obtain it. Good-morning."

He was gone, and from the high window Elinor watched him idly across the square. A man to depend upon, her judgment told her, with straight eyes and a brave mouth. His tread was firm and manly as he crossed the square. But why had he put that into her head about thieves and pictures? Such an idea had never crossed her mind before. It was not a pleasant one.

But she forgot all about it in the rush that followed. The house was full of strangers, a procession of sordid-looking carts stood all day before the door and attracted the attention of the square. Next day the auctioneer's hammer knocked down the familiar

things of a girl's lifetime to people who saw nothing in them but tables and chairs. When dusk fell and the flat was quiet again, it was also empty. Even little Pam's voice rang across the rooms like a knell of what had gone.

But there was no time to repine. Elinor had seen her caller of the day before in the distance, and he had secured the chair and himself carried it off. She wondered why she felt glad when she heard of the almost fancy price he had paid for it. At least he was an honest man who would not use his knowledge to rob the ignorant.

A night's lodging had been secured in a modest hotel near by, and next day the little family was to separate. The remaining hours were winged, and it seemed only a few minutes before they stood together in Charing Cross Station, waiting for the Continental boat-train to start. There were many happy people there, going abroad for the first time, with hearts full of eagerness for all they were to see. But some looked sad and lonely. Perhaps their journey was to begin in a very different way from what they had once thought.

Luggage labelled for Lucerne and Milan was rapidly wheeled up. Good-byes were said, doors were slammed, and the long, winding train with its load of people moved out of the big station.

Hands and handkerchiefs waved madly, and tears were in many eyes, but the train went heedlessly on. Then Elinor found herself left with a little crowd on the platform, and in future she and Hannah must stand between their children and the world.

But Elinor was young and brave and determined

to do it. She held Pamela firmly by the hand and bade Antony come along. Out of her own scant pocket-money she had promised them tea at a café where a band played ; and she did not mean to give either them or herself time to be miserable. Hannah had already gone down to Nestlecombe to make the new home ready, and Elinor felt strangely forlorn without her as she took her little family back to the dingy hotel and persuaded them to go to bed early.

She herself sat up rather late, taking a last farewell of London. What would happen before she saw dear, dirty Bloomsbury again ? Something surely, her heart told her—and perhaps it would never again be necessary to leave the sweet green place to which they were going.

Mindful of Richard Elkin's words Elinor had taken the precious picture to the bedroom with her and propped it up on the chimney-piece until morning that it might not be out of her sight. She took a candle and looked at it before she got into bed. All the things that had happened lately seemed to show her new meanings in that wonderful, sorrowful face. Under the delicate lace veil and serene brow the sad eyes held a message for the girl. They said that great souls had never sought for happiness before service. The mother of Jesus had never failed to do the task that came daily to her hand in the carpenter's home at Nazareth.

" And if she—why not I ? " said Elinor aloud.

She knelt by the little bed where Pam was fast asleep and prayed for grace to do it well.

They could not help being excited next morning, all three of them, at the prospect of such a journey as

they had scarcely taken for years. Indeed, Antony and Pam had never been further than the Surrey hills, and mostly took their notions of the country from London parks. Terrible cockneys their mother called them with a sigh, but that was all to be a thing of the past now.

"Can we have a taxi? And can I fetch it?" demanded Antony, tearing up the stairs.

"Yes; but not yet. Pam, is Binky ready? And have you put your slippers in the bag?"

"Binky is quite ready," announced Pam, pushing the sharp nose of the Aberdeen terrier into Elinor's hand. "Look at him. He's got his very best ribbon on, and his Sunday smile. He's enjoying himself frightfully."

"Well, don't you let go of that leader for one instant. I rely on you to take charge of Binky, Pam. It will be your fault if we lose him between here and Waterloo Station.

"Yes, Elinor."

Pam looked solemn with importance as she was hoisted into the taxi by Antony. She squeezed Binky to such an extent as he sat up on her knee that he nearly barked himself hoarse as the taxi bounded through the dull streets that led to the station.

It was a very dark and foggy morning in London, with the lamps lit in the shops and a thick brown fog creeping down everybody's throat. The Thames was a sullen, mud-coloured river covered with dejected craft. Out of the fog the domes and towers along its banks looked black and desolate indeed.

Pamela looked down on it as the taxi tore across a bridge.

"It doesn't remind you much of magic barges, does it, Binky?" she said, and then she forgot everything else, for the taxi stopped and a porter came out to take the luggage.

"Now, Tony, you've got the picture and Pam's got Binky. Keep hold of her and follow that porter while I take the tickets, and whatever you do, don't lose either."

"What do you take me for?" asked Tony. "I'm thirteen. I hope I can mind a little girl and a dog. Don't get excited, Elinor, there's a good soul."

But Elinor had disappeared, and Binky at that moment setting off on his own account, Antony had all he could do to keep his charges in sight. The train was in, and in two minutes Elinor reappeared, somewhat hot and harassed, but with the tickets safely taken and all her belongings about her. An empty carriage was found, for they were in more than good time. With a sigh of relief she sank into her corner, while the obliging porter piled up all the bundles which had had to be made parcels at the last moment. There were a good many of them and the racks were full. It was to be hoped that few passengers would be bound for the west country that morning.

And so it seemed until the station clock pointed to ten minutes off the hour. Then there was a stampede, and it looked as if all London wanted to go to Exeter and Plymouth. A fussy old lady, decidedly deaf, approached the carriage where the Tempest family had established themselves, and had a good many things to say about the use of luggage vans.

In vain Elinor pushed and pulled and re-arranged, until brown-paper packages and various band-boxes threatened to part company with their contents. It was impossible to find room in that railway carriage for both the old lady's parrot and the superfluous possessions of the Tempests.

"Antony," said Elinor in an agonised voice. "Put the picture in the corridor. You can keep your eye on it there. It only looks like an ordinary parcel."

"Bother that picture," grumbled Antony. "I wish dad had taken it to Italy, or stored it, or something. It's going to be the burden of our lives."

"Well, never mind now. Help him out with it, Pam. Yes, madam," to the old lady with the parrot. "I will do my best to make a little room. You see we are removing——"

"Elinor! Elinor!" screamed Pam's voice in agony. "Binky's gone. Look! look! he's off down the platform—we've lost him—and the train—oh!"

Pam's words ended in a burst of tears.

She had been engrossed in the green parrot, which looked at her as though she had no business to be travelling that morning, and then had opened its sharp beak and wished her good-day. So charmed had she been with this that Binky's leader had slipped from her hand. He always hated to be led and growled at his collar, while within his puzzled terrier's mind he was no doubt wondering whatever he was doing in such a strange thing as a train. This was his moment, and when he felt Pam's little hand relax, he bounded out and away across the platform as fast as his short legs could carry him.

The guard had come out with his green flag and

his whistle and was looking at his watch. The last empty milk-can, the last canvas trunk were being tipped into the van. In two minutes the train would start.

Elinor felt absolutely helpless. She had never known such a moment in all her life. Already her new task was taking all her courage—but what to do now she knew not.

"We can't do anything," she said in despair, while Pam sobbed, and Antony tried to get out.

"Tony—I won't go without you and there isn't another train until—for ages. Guard! Guard! We've lost our dog. Oh—who's that?"

For a tall man, who somehow looked familiar, had sprung from a carriage near by. He tore across the platform and through a door into which Binky had disappeared. Elinor held her breath as she watched it.

"We can't keep the train, miss," said the guard severely. "Yer should ha' held on tighter. But we might find the dog and send him on fust train."

"Oh, I won't go without my Binky. He's Binky Tempest—he's one of the family," sobbed Pam.

"That'll be yer own choice, missie," remarked the guard. "But if yer going ter get out yer'd better be stirrin'."

"Hurrah," called out Antony. "He's got him."

For sure enough the young man reappeared breathlessly, but with Binky in his arms. He had no time to go back to his own carriage. All he could do was to toss Binky on to Pam's lap and spring in after him before the guard waved his flag and blew his whistle, and the long train began to move. Elinor breathed hard and mopped her brow.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said. "And

this carriage is so congested, I'm sure you will have a horrid journey. I expect you were in an empty smoking one."

"Oh no, I wasn't. The whole train is full. Let me stow those things up. There, now we're ship-shape. Can I do anything else?"

"Why, you are the man that came to look at the chair," put in Pam. "And carried it down the street. I saw you—me and Tony was watching. It was awful fun. I'm so glad it's you that's found Binky. You are not going to Nestlecombe, are you? We are; Hannah's gone now to get the cottage ready. It's a teeny weeny place. Won't it be fun?"

"Hush, Pam," said Elinor. "I thought I knew your face. It is awfully kind of you, Mr.—er—I don't know your name."

"Elkin—Richard Elkin. But are you really going down to Nestlecombe?"

"Yes—for the summer. Do you know it?"

"Oh, perfectly. I live at Salisbury—in the Close. My uncle—but may I present my credentials in proper form, as there is nobody to introduce us."

He foraged in his pockets and produced a card which set forth that he, Richard Elkin, was already a partner in a firm of lawyers in the old city. Elinor glanced at it and put it in her bag with a word of thanks. She had seen more of the world than most girls of her age, and for the present this man's credentials lay in his face.

As soon as he joined them the journey began to be pleasant, while a load of care rolled off Elinor. The old lady with the parrot got out at Weybridge, and after that there was plenty of room.

"This is jolly, said Richard, looking across at Binky with grateful eyes. Surely his good angel was abroad this morning and had brought him to the rescue of the girl whose eyes he had not forgotten.

"Do you know—the old lady who wanted your chair lives at Nestlecombe. The chair is in the van at this moment going down to her."

"Indeed," cried Elinor. "I wonder whether we shall know her. It would be strange to sit as a visitor on that old friend."

A faint look of amusement crossed Richard's face.

"It seems a shame to tell you so," he said. "But there's not much hope. I don't think there have been three guests at Nestlecombe Hall in ten years. Mrs. Devale is a recluse, and the village says a cantankerous one. She sees nobody except her own daughter. Poor thing, she must have a time of it. She comes to our office sometimes—a tall dark-haired woman with the saddest face I ever saw."

Once again the sympathy that came so readily to Richard's eyes, spoke to Elinor, and attracted her. But his story attracted her more.

"How dreadful—and are they very rich?" she asked.

"Oh, very—but they get little pleasure out of that."

"Strange, isn't it?" said the girl, who knew so well what the limitations of poverty were. "Poor people's pleasures are few—but perhaps we get more out of them."

"I'm sure of it," agreed Richard. "Mrs. Devale seldom goes out, and then always in a huge closed carriage like a box on wheels. She has a will of iron, and there are lots of stories about her and

Nestlecombe Hall. I dare say you will hear some of them, but the Devales have always been a self-willed lot that would have their own way. I suppose their family legend proves that. There's generally some truth in those old tales."

"Oh, do tell us it?" begged Pam. "We love stories, don't we, Elinor?"

"Better than anything," said Elinor. "Particularly old ones."

"Well, it's a very picturesque tale, is this," went on Richard. "Only I can't tell it well. Once, long ago, somewhere in the Middle Ages I suppose, the Devale of that day was a terrible old character. There's a big dark lake in the park, and beside it, if you ever get into the grounds, you'll see a ruined tower. That's where this old chap used to do his dark deeds, for he was a sort of wizard. He spent his time in mixing up chemicals and weaving spells to find the philosopher's stone or some such thing. Some said he had the evil eye, and there's a picture of him in the library that might well prove it."

"He sounds awfully interesting," put in Elinor.

"Oh, the old chap was interesting enough, I grant you. He used to be seen sometimes, so the story runs, on the edge of the lake at midnight, floating a silver barge out on the dark water. It reminds one of the legends of King Arthur and his passing, for it was a very mysterious barge. None knew where it came from, where he kept it, or to what place he sailed in it, for it was only on moonlight nights it was ever seen."

At the mention of the barge Pam sat up and even Antony listened. Somehow all three of the Tempests

felt that this story had something special to do with them.

"Well, this old chap had a son," went on Richard. "As decent a fellow as ever stepped and as honourable. He loved his country and he felt for the oppression of the people. By the way, his name was Antony, like this boy's. The people loved this Antony, but they hated his father who ground them down and laid taxes on them because he needed always more money for his experiments. If they refused, he cursed them, and as it was a terribly ignorant age they could not sleep in their beds if they were not able to pay. Last of all the old man's son, Antony, married a daughter of the people, a beautiful girl, whose father rose up and led the countryside against the old tyrant. They smashed up some of his property and ruined his tower, and that night he cursed his son, and all who should come after him."

"How terrible," said Elinor with a shiver, looking out into the waking woods where the sap was stirring. Something old, invisible, and awful seemed to creep into the atmosphere from such a story, to say that mind and thought are terrible as well as noble things.

"Well, it was terrible, and it's a singular fact that in each generation of Devales since then somebody has broken away from the family tradition. There have always been misunderstandings and estrangements from that day to this, and I suppose for that reason the legend has arisen. It is known as a rhyme now, for the village folk say that when somebody is forgiven at Nestlecombe Hall the silver barge will float on the lake again. It is said you can see it in the

shadows under the trees on moonlight nights, deep down under the water."

"How mysterious," said Elinor. "And how attractive. But what a sad story in its later days."

"Yes—the rhyme is rather pretty.

> 'When Devale is forgiven for love's dear sake,
> The silver barge will float on the lake.'"

"Elinor," said little Pam, in one of her sudden outbursts. "Was it this silver barge that mummy and dad were talking about?"

Elinor turned and looked at her sister, her own eyes still full of dreams. Pam's words arrested her and thrilled her heart with something new and wonderful on the horizon of her life.

But she only smiled.

"I don't expect so," she said. "Oh, look, children. Do you see the spire? It must be Salisbury."

"Yes—it is Salisbury," said Richard, sorry he knew not why that her mind had gone from the old story to the slender cathedral spire that rose up towards heaven above the trees and the clustering roofs.

Elinor leaned from the window fascinated. There it was—the most wonderful spire in the land, under which old hearts had been inspired, noble gallant old lives had been lived, and one gentle dreamer had touched his old world and ours.

Under that influence Elinor would dream too—dream noble things and do them. A strange affinity, born of she knew not what, sprang into being in her soul. This country would hold something good for her, she knew. A suddenly born tenderness held her

fast, as the train slowly steamed into the light airy station of the old cathedral city.

Elinor saw Hannah, ready and radiant, waiting on the platform, with a look of being at home on her face that she had never worn in London.

"Here we are," said Richard Elkin, beginning to unpile the parcels, and then Antony's voice struck on his sister's ear.

"Elinor," he said. "Oh, Elinor—it was the story. I got so interested I took my eye off it. And it's gone. What shall we do? The picture's gone. We've lost the Botticelli Madonna."

CHAPTER III

THE YEARS BETWEEN

Love is swift of foot;
Love's a man of war,
And can shoot,
And can hit from far.

—*George Herbert.*

IT was three days before the Tempest family's eventful journey that Hannah arrived at Nestlecombe. She did not look a romantic figure as she left the station at Salisbury; but under her plainly-parted black hair, now streaked with grey, and the straw hat that had done good service, her temples throbbed like a girl's when she saw the old streets and the slender spire.

She did not look behind her much, however, for it was to Nestlecombe that her heart outran her footsteps. She had sometimes wondered whether her life was to end in London, but had always cherished a dream of coming back to the old place. And now she was to see it again, with the children she loved as dearly. Having only a basket in her hand, she hurried on, and she was soon in the green lanes, between hedges already budding. The great trees overhead appeared to wave a welcome in the February wind. They were old friends, and she saw no change in their faces. Just so had they once waved their branches over

Hannah on this same country road when she was a girl.

"To think of it," she said aloud. "My! To think of it. I wonder, I do wonder now, if the flowering currant'll still be at the gate."

She was a mile from the town now, but she had several to walk, yet the way seemed almost short, it was so paved with old memories. Hannah was so deep in them that she did not hear a fast-trotting horse, and a merry sort of jingling, coming up behind, until a man's voice cried, "Whoa!" and a cart drew up beside her.

She looked round and saw a man about fifty years of age, with a pleasant face, tanned and rosy with many years of outdoor life, who was leaning over the side of an old-fashioned milk-cart full of empty cans.

"I say, missus," he remarked pleasantly, "be ye bound for Nestlecombe? For if so, mebbe ye'd like a ride. Ye're welcome if ye would, an' it's a warm day."

"Thank ye kindly," said Hannah, with a glad feeling at her heart that she had left London behind her, and might trust an honest countryman.

She handed him her basket, and swung herself into the cart with all the agility of a girl. He looked at her closely as she did so, but said nothing until they had jogged on their way for some minutes.

"Be you a stranger in these parts?" he asked her then.

"No, indeed—leastways yes, I am," returned Hannah. "That is, my body is, but my heart, nay—that's ne'er been a stranger to Nestlecombe, though I ain't seen it for twenty years until to-day."

"Is that so?" said the countryman, flicking his

horse with his whip, and setting the cans jangling. His tone was full of rising interest, and he was evidently casting his mind back over the last twenty years. Then he leaned forward and looked full at Hannah.

"Missus," he began.

"Call me no missus," said Hannah severely. "I ain't tired o' going to bed master an' gettin' up master yet."

"I knowed it was her," cried the countryman with delight, slapping his own substantial knee. "Don't tell me as Dick Raven wouldn't rekernize Hannah Snell, after twice twenty year. And not a day older! But surely, how is it ye're Hannah Snell yet?"

He asked her eagerly, and all unknown to herself, she tossed her head and bridled. The Tempest family would indeed have stared, could they have seen their staid retainer.

"Wasn't I always partial to my own name?" she asked him, almost archly.

"Ye was that—but I thought when ye went off to London—well, well! My, Hannah, but I am pleased to see ye."

"Ye'll be a grandfer yerself, no doubt," remarked Hannah carelessly.

"A grandfer? Nothing o' the kind. 'Tisn't on'y women have the faithful hearts down our way, my girl. I'm a bachelor, same as I always was. And doin' well in the milk trade, too. It fair puzzles me who to leave it to."

"Oh, ye'll have plenty o' friends when ye come to make yer will," remarked Hannah, but that she was rarely pleased, nobody who knew her well could have

failed to see. If anything could have made her return perfection, it was to find, during the first half-hour, Dick Raven still faithful. There was quite a girlish pink on her cheek as the cart bowled along between waking woods where thrushes were singing as though they knew well that Hannah had come home—as perhaps they did.

"Do you mind our old cat, Hannah?" asked Dick pensively after a pause. "It was them thrushes made me think of her. She was death on thrushes, poor old pussy was."

"Ay, I mind her," said Hannah. "You was always soft-hearted with animals and children, Dick. She'll ha' been gone this many a year."

"Ah! yes. I'd a mind to have her stuffed, but I thought better on't. She lies at bottom o' garden. There's a might o' snowdrops comin' up all about her now."

"Speakin' of old cats," said Hannah—"leastways, I should say you speakin' o' yours—made me think of your old home. Has yer mother gone?"

They were nearing the village of Nestlecombe. The great oaks, the sweeping elms, were grander overhead. The wooded slopes about Nestlecombe Hall could be seen below the distant downs. Here and there peeped out the brown thatched eaves, the cream-washed walls of old and charming cottages. Above them brooded the mellow grey stone tower of the church and the yew-trees that guarded homely graves.

Dick pointed with his whip to a corner where the crocuses were opening their brave golden hearts.

"She lies just there," he said. "I don't deny she was a bit awk'ard at times, but it's dull for a man

all alone. He even misses a bit o' temper when it's gone."

"You was always gentle with her, Dick," said Hannah. "And others wasn't."

He seemed to understand what she meant, but he said nothing, and there was a long pause as they entered the lane that led to the village. Every deep-eaved cottage, every little garden where the snowdrops were bright, had a message from the past for Hannah. There was not a new one among them, she felt glad to see. In her inmost heart she knew she would never be able to go away again.

"Dick, how's old mistress?" she asked suddenly.

Dick shook his head. "Failin'," he said—"failin' considerable. But stout-hearted for all that, ay, and strong-willed. She'll be that to the last. But it's bad for Miss Elizabeth. She's a dreary life, poor young lady, and it gets no better. It's a sad face has grown on her the last few years, but a gentle heart; there's but little misses Miss Elizabeth in other folks' sorrows."

"Ay, your own tears makes a wonderful telescope if ye see through 'em right," said Hannah. "But she'll be gettin' into years. She's none a young lady now."

"Well, I suppose not," said Dick. "But time goes by without us marking its furrows here. And where are ye bound for, Hannah?"

"Jessamine Cottage," said Hannah, and then her lips closed with a snap which Dick Raven had once known well.

"Settling there?" he asked briefly.

"Yes, I've two young ladies and a young gentleman to see to while their pa and ma's abroad. They're coming on Friday, and I have two clear days to get

straight. I shall need all my time. I shan't have no spare minutes for gossiping."

"Ye won't," agreed Dick; "it's in a rare state is that cottage. I wish you joy of your job. I'm a dab hand with a colour-washing brush myself. I does all my own. And ye'll want milk. Ye shall have a can night and morning."

"Well, I don't mind dealing with ye for the milk," said Hannah. "But it would be a strange mess of a cottage that I couldn't cope with single-handed in two days."

"You wait," was the laconic reply.

"Well, here we are," said Hannah, her eyes full of dreams again, as the cottage came into sight. It stood back from the village street, with a long garden, and a red-tiled path between box borders leading to the porch. There were two quaintly cut yew-trees at either side of the wooden gate, there was a cosy little arbour near the corner of the house, and sure enough, the first thing that Hannah saw clearly through her tears was the flowering currant bush that looked over the wall and was already putting out green leaves.

"To think of it," she said—"just to think of it. Not a bit changed after all these years. Good day, Dick. I ain't got any more time to spare."

But Dick bided his time, and when he strolled that way after tea, he found Hannah as near despair as she had ever been in her vigorous life. The last tenants of Jessamine Cottage had indeed left chaos behind them, out of which order had to come, but even Hannah did not quite see how.

But when Dick had mended the grandfather's clock, had cream-washed the kitchen, and suggested a

cheerful rose for the parlour, it was a different place. Hannah watched him go home in the scented spring dusk down the village street, a milk-can in his hand, with something like pride.

"A personable man yet," she said; "and one as many a maid half his age might be glad to get. My! I could wish master had taken to the milk business, or the colour-washin' trade. Anything better than that pesky writin' as toils all day, and catches nothin', and a deal more healthy. But there, folks have their own notions."

She shut and locked the door, and went back to the kitchen. It was a roomy old spot, and she stirred the fire, and set out her simple supper of country produce. But she had not tasted anything so good for twenty years. And when she made herself up a shake-down before the fire and went to sleep, she thanked God she was back among green fields.

It was Dick Raven who drove Hannah to Salisbury to meet the family, and who made all the arrangements for getting their luggage to Nestlecombe. He it was also who put a cheerful face on matters when the terrible news was told in Salisbury station.

"Oh, Hannah, we've lost the picture. Yes, the picture—mother's Madonna. It's been stolen out of the corridor. We were talking, and——"

"Talking! I'll be bound ye were. And who to, I should like to know?"

Hannah looked severely after the disappearing form of Richard Elkin, who had not ventured to shake hands all round when he saw the prim figure who came to meet his new friends. He had but pulled Binky's ears and said a gay good-bye to Pam.

"Oh, such a nice man, Hannah," said Pam. "He went after Binky when he ran away in the station and brought him back. Then he got in our carriage, and he told us a lovely tale about the barge, and——"

The little party were moving out of the station now, but Hannah stopped.

"Ye've not lost much time," she said grimly, though her eyes were anxious. "It's all silly nonsense about the barge, and no business of yours. As for the gentleman, why, it's as plain as the nose on that there Binky's face. He's the one that's got up this business, of course. Lots of thieves looks like gentlemen until you see 'em close. Ye say he's a lawyer and lives in Salisbury? More than likely. Isn't lawyers the greatest rascals on the face of the earth?"

"But, Hannah," cried Pam and Antony, "you've made a mistake. He was a gentleman, and he told us a stunning——"

"You come along out to the cart," said Hannah in her severest tone. "Was you born first or was I? As for that picture, neither one of the Tempest family ever had a bit o' worldly wisdom, and I've always had my doubts about it. No sane person 'd part with gold for a musty old thing like that. 'Tisn't as if it had a handsome frame to it; and if ye've lost it, why you have, and that's all about it. We might set the police on, but that would only mean expense, and myself, I don't trust 'em. It's a pity it's gone, for your ma set great store by it; but as for bein' worth much, why, I never did think it would fetch five shillings. And we shan't have the burden of minding it, so you see there's a silver lining to the worst of clouds. For all that, it was mighty careless of you, and I

thought you, Miss Elinor, had your head screwed on tighter."

"So did I," said Elinor, following the rest out of the station, with a strange depression at her heart. She no longer wanted to linger and see the cathedral among its lawns before she went home. The beginning was not so good as she had thought. And surely—surely there could be no truth in Hannah's words about their travelling companion.

But when she got out to the cart, and saw Dick Raven in his Sunday suit, Elinor forgot her troubles. The carrier was to bring the luggage, but Hannah was well satisfied with the bargain she had made for the conveyance of the Tempest family to their future home.

"A—person as I knew in days gone by," she said to Elinor, jerking her head in the direction of the charioteer. "Mr. Raven. He's going to drive us. They've managed to lose the family picter between 'em on the way," she added to Dick.

"The family picter," said the good-natured milkman. "Why, what's that but the family picter, I should like to know?" And he pointed his whip at Pam with Binky in her arms. "There's a picter would make a real life-like almanac in a grocer's window for Christmas."

"Climb up in the cart, Miss Pam, and try to be a good girl," said Hannah. "Never mind being an almanac just now."

The events of the last half-hour had left Pam subdued, and she meekly did as she was told. But Elinor remembered the little talk she had heard in the dark. Romance was a wonderful thing to her, whether it went in homespun or cloth of gold.

The Years Between

Meanwhile, Richard Elkin had given the precious Jacobean chair into the care of the carrier for Nestlecombe, and glad to be rid of his charge, was on his way home to the old house in the Close. It was only a few days since he had left Salisbury, and there had occasionally been times in the past when he had come back from London to the old country office and the dull country cases with a feeling that he was wasting his time. But after all he had a tender feeling for the old place, though he said little about it. He would be sorry to turn his back upon the dull detail, the family histories, which had made the substantial business which his father had left to his only son, and his oldest friend.

It would all be Richard's some day; and he was already a quiet thoughtful man, who inspired confidence, and possessed an inward pluck and grit that was not often daunted in carrying a thing through.

Few people would have recognised the turmoil in his heart as a part of Richard Elkin, as he went quickly through the old streets on his way home. It only showed in his eyes, and nobody was sufficiently interested in his heart to look into them before he reached the Close.

It was not yet dark, though the dusk of the February day was falling quickly. Something strangely homelike and restful came home to Richard as he went in under the Close gate, and turned towards the house in the corner. The wonderful cathedral that had seen so many stories lived and told, was growing dim in the gloaming. The trees were shadowy and still. The old houses seemed asleep, or to be quiet folds where happy people were safe within.

The one in the corner was as beautiful as any in that beautiful Close. It was not very large, but was tucked in cosily between two bigger ones, and Richard could see the red firelight streaming out from a low window where he knew that an old man sat waiting patiently yet eagerly for his return.

Richard crossed the broad way, and opened the little gate. He looked up towards the window in the gable, and noticed that the flowers had begun to open while he had been in London. And it was not only in this old garden in the Cathedral Close that they had done so.

He passed into the square hall and went down a narrow low passage to an ancient door set deep in the wall. This he opened, and went into the room which had always been the centre of his life and home.

There was no woman there—only an old, rather frail-looking man sitting in the big window that he might catch the last daylight on his book. He was dressed like any other clergyman, and his white hair was smoothly brushed, yet there was always about Richard's uncle, Canon Elkin, the air of an earlier age and a simpler day.

He was reading in an old-fashioned book bound in brown calf, its pages themselves so brown that he could hardly decipher them. It was called *The Literary Remains of Mr. George Herbert*, and had been printed three hundred years ago, at the sign of the little door near St. Paul's.

Richard smiled when he saw it. Twenty years ago, when he had been brought by an old servant from a sorrowful house to make his home with his uncle, he had found him reading that book, and he often found

him reading it now, for time was a fiction to the old man.

"Still at the old parson," said Richard cheerily. "I've brought you down some books from town that will make your mouth water, uncle." The old man got up and shook hands with his nephew, looking into his face, and laying his hand on the young man's strong shoulder.

"That's right, that's right," he said. "We'll have them after tea, my boy. I'm glad to see you back. I've just been reading a bit of dear old Herbert. Do you remember one of his proverbs?—'Little journeys, and good cost, bring safe home.'"

Richard laughed.

"Well, there was a good deal of cost about this one. I paid a long price for the chair. Mrs. Devale should be satisfied, for it is worth it. But I never knew her satisfied with anything yet."

"No, poor thing—poor thing," said the old Canon. "But the Devales have seldom looked life straight in the face, or accepted what came. I've been reading another dear old line. 'Fractures well cured make us more strong.' But you won't believe that, Richard, until you are as old and tottery as I am, and that thick poll of yours is white."

"Don't you speak of yourself as tottery," said Richard, "or I shall step out and fetch Dr. Briton without a moment's delay, and how would you like that?"

"Not at all, my boy. The spring sunshine is my doctor, and a right good one. Why, I've been across the grass this afternoon, and sitting in the cathedral awhile. I think I had a vision there, for I seemed to see dear old George come in and join me, and we had

communion together. You remember my favourite verse.

'A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye,
Or, if he pleaseth, through it pass
And the heavens espy.'

George Herbert must have been looking up at the same clear windows when he saw through that window of the soul. Mrs. Devale is an old woman, Richard, but she has not got past the glass yet. Valuable, stained glass it may be, and old into the bargain, but she will have to look through before she sees the sky. Shall you be going out to the Hall?"

A faint shadow crossed Richard's face, which did not escape his uncle. He shifted his chair, and looked out through the window. His business visits to Nestlecombe Hall had always been one of the irksome things of his life, but he was conscious of a sudden strong desire for anything to take him to Nestlecombe —and yet of a strange diffidence in going there.

"What's the use?" he said. "The chair will be set up for all to see, but she will do nothing but grumble at the shameful bargain I have made, while her daughter looks distressed. The poor thing has enough to bear."

"Old people need bearing with, Richard," said his uncle, with a smile.

"Do they, uncle?" asked his nephew. "Then you have discovered the secret of perpetual youth, or the philosopher's stone. I don't know which."

"This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold,
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told,"

quoted the old man softly. A flame leapt up in the ruddy fire, and lit the shadows of the room. It illumined a large portrait that hung over the carved chimney-piece, and Canon Elkin looked up into the face of the long-ago poet whom he often called "the saint of Salisbury." He saw a thin face with a short life stamped upon its every feature. But the poet's brow was high and thoughtful, his eyes were deep and true. He wore the plain rich dress of the scholarly gentleman of his day, and as he looked down from his carved frame into the quiet room, it seemed as though his old wise thoughts still touched the life of the Close where he once loved to walk.

The door of the old room opened suddenly, and an elderly maid brought in tea. She was a Scotswoman who ruled her masters with a rod of iron, and lived in dread of the day when a young fair face should preside over their tea-table. She put down the quaint silver teapot with a bang, and placed the muffins on the hearth, but beyond a nod to Richard she did not speak.

The sight of her reminded the Canon of something else, and he left his book and the window, and came to the fireside, where he stood warming his hands.

"This is comfortable, my lad," he said. "I've missed you sorely, Richard. You are too good to the old man. You know it's time you were bringing a wife home to the Close, to shake us both out of our bachelor ways."

The old Canon repeated this little pleasantry about once a week, and it was generally answered with some gay sally by Richard. But this afternoon, as he flourished the teapot with an ease born of long practice, he said nothing. Nay, a dull red glow crept up

under his tanned skin, and his eyes did not meet his uncle's.

The Canon saw it all, but only helped himself to muffin.

"I saw a face this morning," he remarked, "that carried me back twenty years. I had a stroll through the town, and I was down by the Poultry Cross, when I heard a good woman's voice haggling over some earthenware bowls. She was bent on driving a bargain, and she did it too. Her hair was grey, and life had taught her something, but if that were not Hannah Snell, I never knew Hannah in the old days."

"Hannah Snell?" said Richard, without much curiosity.

"You don't know anything about her," replied his uncle. "But she was a bonny girl at Nestlecombe once. I always thought Hannah was a rare picture of a faithful heart. She was so engrossed in her pottery she did not see me, but she must have come home again, and I shall look out for her."

The memory of a strident voice and a severe face under an old black hat suddenly came to Richard. It was impossible that his uncle's faithful maid and Pamela's dragon could be one and the same.

"I—er—travelled with some people who appeared to be coming new to the neighbourhood to-day," he said after a pause.

"Oh! That does not often happen."

"No—they—er—were young too. A girl and two children. And strange to say, they were coming to Nestlecombe. I was fortunate enough to rescue the little girl's dog, so I made friends."

"Indeed—that's something new for you, Richard."

Richard laughed. "I'm afraid I'm but a stick-in-the-mud," he said. "But you see, uncle, they seemed so interested in the neighbourhood, and the little girl—her name was Pamela—gave me a good deal of information. They are going to Nestlecombe for the summer, and I gathered their father was a literary man out of health. He had gone abroad."

"Pamela," said the old man meditatively, "it's a long time since there was a little Pamela at Nestlecombe. Pamela what, I wonder?"

"Pamela Tempest was her name."

"Pamela Tempest!" The light from another day leapt up suddenly into the old Canon's eyes in the firelight. He put down his teacup and forgot his muffin, which went cold upon his plate. For quite a long time he sat looking into the fire, lost to Richard and the room about him.

"Uncle," said the young man at last, "I'm eating all the muffins and drinking all the tea. What are you thinking about?"

"Thinking about, lad," said the old man. "An old man's wandering thoughts have deep roots that are hard to pull up and transplant. But I was thinking just then of a wedding many years ago. It was very early on a summer morning, and the bride was bonny. When the wedding was over her name was Ellen Pamela Tempest, and she was so full of hopes, and he was so full of ambition. I wonder whether they have been fulfilled."

Richard's attention was wandering. He was accustomed to his uncle's dreams out of his own past, when his visions were not of the scholar-poet of Bemerton. His own inward eyes were travelling

along the green lanes to Nestlecombe after a milkman's cart, where a slender girl sat trying to steady herself and cling to the remaining family possessions. He wondered what she was doing now, and whether on her first evening at Nestlecombe the thought of him had as much as crossed her mind.

It had, but not in the way that would have given Richard Elkin any pleasure. There had been a delightful tea in the rose-walled parlour which Hannah had made so wonderfully home-like with the grandfather's clock, white muslin curtains, and a geranium. Antony and Pam had beaten every previous record they had ever made, while Hannah had beamed upon the company and been persuaded to pour out the tea, as she listened to their praises of Nestlecombe.

When Elinor had unpacked boxes and seen her little sister into bed, she went back into the quiet sitting-room to write to her mother. Out in the garden she could hear Antony rigging up a bed for Binky. In the kitchen Hannah was washing up the tea-things, and putting them away in the oak-panelled cupboards. She was crooning to herself as she did so, for Hannah was happy. The old grandfather's clock ticked on unperturbed in the corner of the room. It had an oak case and a brass face, which Hannah had made a shining one, and there was something very cheering and soothing in its monotonous voice. It seemed to say "Come—home. Come—home." Somehow Elinor felt that they had.

Outside the village was silent, while a young moon was rising over the tree tops in Nestlecombe Park. Pamela had indeed sniffed spring as she undressed,

while she listened to a blackbird that was building his nest in the ivy outside her window. But now even the birds were still, and the beautiful fragrant country silence, which is part of that peace which the world cannot give, stole into the atmosphere of Elinor's heart, and made a home for itself there.

But she must not forget that she had a very hard task before her—to tell her mother that they had been careless enough to lose the Madonna. Would she think it boded ill for her daughter's care of the family? Elinor had but a dim idea of what the value of an Old Master might be, and the possible money loss did not trouble her much.

But something else did, although she drove it away and told herself it was nonsense. She could not forget Hannah's words when Pam told her about their fellow-traveller. It was impossible that a man so frank, so kind, with such a humorous smile and such understanding eyes, could have made friends with them to steal their picture. Yet Hannah always appeared terribly versed in the ways of the world to the girl who had been so long used to obey her. And after all, he was a stranger. What did it matter if he were also a thief?

Elinor drew her writing-case towards her, and told herself that of course it did not matter at all—except that they had lost their picture. But in her secret heart of hearts she knew that it mattered more than tongue would be willing to tell.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie,
My music shows ye have your closes,
And all must die.

—*George Herbert.*

IT was the first week in March, and the half term, when Antony joined the big school at which he had gained an entrance scholarship. He had never been to a public school before, for the cough which London fogs never failed to bring on had kept him mostly within doors in winter, and his mother had often sighed as she looked at him, for sometimes she had fancied that Antony would never be a man.

But already country air and Nestlecombe milk were putting roses into the boy's cheeks and strength into his limbs. He had displayed a development of muscle to Pam which Bloomsbury never saw, and his little sister tried in vain to produce the same appearance on her own rounded arm. She envied Antony on that windy morning when he first went to school.

Pamela knew no fear of man or boy, and the more people she found about her to talk to, the better she was pleased. But Antony was shy at heart, and deep

down in his soul was dreading his first appearance at school. He was terrified lest either of his sisters should find this out, and whistled his loudest as he dressed himself in the neat new suit which Elinor had put out so carefully, and with so many injunctions to take care of it. He would have been much happier in his old one, and said so, grumbling all the time she was stitching the buttons on more firmly, that women always thought new times and new clothes must go together.

"How nice you look," said Pam admiringly, when her brother came down to breakfast, still whistling "Yankee Doodle," to show that he did not care for all the new schools in England.

"Bah!" said Antony. "You girls think if you're only togged up in new rigs you are ready for the army. It takes something else than that, let me tell you." And Antony attacked his porridge with only half an appetite.

"Yes, it does," agreed Pam. "Lots and lots of courage, as well as a good big gun, I should say. But never mind, Antony—you are only going to school. And Elinor and me—we are going with you half-way."

Antony stared at his sister and grew red. "What are you talking about?" he said. "You are only seven, and who's afraid? D'you suppose I mind?"

"No," said Pam, between two spoonfuls of brown treacle. "I was only wondering."

"Well, you needn't wonder," remarked Antony tartly. "And—and you've no need to go with me—if you're tired."

"Tired!" exclaimed Pam. "We've only just got

up. We are going for a long walk and to take our lunch. You see, we should be awful dull without you, and we shall be thinking of you all day too."

"Oh, well," said Antony, much mollified. "Elinor, I can't eat this great lot of porridge. I'm not hungry."

"He's journey proud," said Hannah, coming in at that moment with bacon and egg for the man of the house. "Here's a treat for you, laddie. This'll keep your pecker up, won't it?"

"It is up," returned Antony with a frown. "I don't know what you all mean, talking as if I were frightened of going to a new school with a lot of country boys who've never been to London in their lives."

"Of course you are not, Antony," said Elinor. "We don't think so. It would be quite unlike any boy with British pluck in him if you were. But now we must start, or you won't be there in time. Say good-bye to Hannah, or she will be disappointed."

Antony disappeared into the kitchen, but Hannah threw her apron over her head and followed the trio down to the gate. There she plucked the first sprig of flowering currant, and stuck it in the hero's coat, while before he knew what she was doing, she had planted a firm kiss on his smooth cheek.

At that moment a boy went swinging down the road on a bicycle, a bag of books on his back, and the cap of the old school jammed over his eyes. It was one of Antony's future schoolmates, and he had seen Hannah kissing him. Could humiliation go further?

Elinor was sorry for her brother, for it was evident

that the strange boy had seen what had occurred. He raised a whoop and went laughing through the village, while Antony followed his sisters, as near to being surly as his open-hearted nature ever came.

"She needn't have done that," he said gruffly, rubbing his cheek.

Elinor put her arm in his. "Never mind, old boy," she said. "It was because she is so fond of you, and you mustn't get vexed with Hannah. She is our best friend, and would give her life for us, I do believe. I find her a bit trying sometimes, you know, but I love her dearly, and she seems part of ourselves. You won't be less of a man ever, Antony, because a good woman shows her affection for you. A big-hearted boy is never ashamed of a thing like that—only be ashamed of meanness and wrong, not because your own people love you."

"No, I won't, Elinor," mumbled Antony, as they stood at the parting of the ways.

"And now I have given you my little lecture," said his sister, "we will go. Pam, shake hands with him like a man, for fear any other grammar-school boys should be lurking behind hedges." And with a laugh, and a sisterly pat on the back, Elinor watched her brother walk away with a more sinking heart than she knew.

She and Pam sauntered slowly through the lanes, and skirted a little wood where already tiny yellow primroses were opening their hearts, deep within green leaves. Shy celandines lined the hedges, where already green buds were bursting forth. In this sheltered corner of the soft south country it was already spring, and far above in the blue a lark was

singing his glorious love-song to his mate hidden in her nest in the grass.

Elinor sat down by the roadside, for they were in a by-lane now, and established herself on a sloping bank against a great oak-tree that had stood sentinel there for many hundred years. Pamela wandered about gathering celandines, and talking to Binky, who was always a sufficient companion, and left her sister to her dreams.

Elinor sat with her elbows on her knees, listening to the larks, and watching the patches of sunlight on the bare woods and many-coloured fields of the upland downs. Far away the country was historic, and many old scenes and old pictures came back to her that she longed to reconstruct for herself. It was Elinor's ambition to follow in her father's footsteps, although it was a charming story-book that she wanted to write. She had tried her 'prentice hand in several places unknown to anybody, and meant to do great things during this summer in the country. She took out her thick black empty note-book, sharpened her pencil, shut her eyes, and tried to remember how she had intended to start.

But either the spring morning or her new life had come between. Every idea she had ever possessed had flown. All those pretty thoughts and fancies that had clamoured for expression in the Bloomsbury flat —where could they have gone, at Nestlecombe? Elinor looked into her own heart, as Sir Philip Sidney told all true writers to do over three hundred years ago, but even there she could find nothing. She could only look at the landscape and listen to the lark, and feel the young glad blood beat in her temples that

told her the earth was beautiful, and life at its morning.

"Elinor!" said Pam's voice suddenly and mysteriously—"Elinor!"

"Well!" Elinor looked up, rather glad to be interrupted, and saw her little sister emerging from the hedge with flushed cheeks, tangled hair, and a torn coat.

"I've torn myself, but it's only my oldest," said Pam cheerily. "Listen! do you hear? It's a carriage with ladies in it, and coming this way. Do help me to hold Binky or he'll bark. Elinor, do you suppose it's the old mistress?"

Elinor laughed. "Whoever do you mean?" she asked.

"Why, that's what Hannah calls her, and I've asked her thousands and millions of questions, but somehow Hannah won't answer them. And all the woods are hers, and Hannah says if Binky ran in them and barked she'd be awfully cross. It disturbs the games, Hannah said. What games could she mean? for I never saw any games hiding in woods; and, if they did, things like cricket and hockey makes such a noise theirselves they would never be disturbed by a little dog like Binky."

"Game—not games," said Elinor. "You poor town-bred child. She meant pheasants and partridges. You see, they have to be kept safely, ready to be shot in autumn, and that is called being preserved."

"Oh, poor, poor things. I thought everything was free in the country, but it's nearly as bad as the parks, except that you can walk on the grass."

Pamela spoke sadly, but at that moment she forgot

all about Binky and the game. A pair of high-stepping horses came round the corner in a leisurely manner, driven by a dignified, grey-haired coachman. Behind them was an open landau, filled with cushions and handsome rugs, in the midst of which sat two ladies facing the horses. One of these was, in the eyes of both Elinor and Pam, very old. She was tall and spare, with iron-grey hair parted immaculately above her brow. She had very bushy eyebrows which nearly met above a pair of the darkest, most piercing eyes that the two girls had ever seen.

In spite of the cushions behind her the old lady sat bolt upright, looking straight before her, with an expression that seemed to say she did not approve of the waking woods or the spring that was so young when she was so old. She never heard the lark, or saw the budding primroses. Her stern, dark eyes surely saw only things that happened long ago, things that had not pleased her.

But beside her, and nearer to the hedge where Elinor sat fascinated for some unknown reason, another lady occupied the carriage. She also was tall and slender, and the ungloved hand that lay on the edge of the carriage told much of a difficult life and a highly-strung nature to those who could read its sign. This woman was about forty years of age, and to little Pam she, too, was old. But to Elinor the face that gazed so sadly yet lovingly at the dark woods, and followed the lark towards the sky, was full of wonderful charm.

She saw a pair of eyes, very dark, too, but full of experiences that had taught her to see far into other people's hearts. Her face was pale, and her soft,

brown hair had here and there a thread of grey. She looked worn, and there were sad, patient lines about her lips. But when Binky gave a short, loud bark, and her eyes fell upon him, she smiled, and her smile was wholly sweet and came from somewhere deeper than her eyes.

The old lady did not turn her head when Binky barked, but a frown crossed her face. Could she have had her will she would have exterminated all dogs but foxhounds, and it was as much as the cottager's place was worth to keep one. Mrs. Devale had turned them out for less.

Her daughter looked at the little dog in surprise, for Binky was a stranger to her, and from his pertly cocked ears her eyes went towards his mistress, who was holding him fast with an anxious expression on her face. What if he should yelp at the horses' heels and the keepers drive the Tempest family out of Nestlecombe!

Miss Elizabeth saw a charming child, with a mass of tumbled chestnut hair. She smiled at the anxious, flower-like face; then she looked towards the elder girl, and suddenly her smile faded in a way that Elinor could not understand. The faint colour left her thin cheek, and a fixed, startled look swept suddenly into her eyes. She forgot where she was and leaned forward, while her hand clutched the carriage, and seemed as though she would rise from her seat and tell the old coachman to stop.

Then as suddenly she relaxed, and fell back against the cushions, for the moment exhausted, and pressed her handkerchief to her lips. Elinor could almost hear the long sigh that escaped her as the carriage passed.

She was uncomfortably conscious that she had stared at its occupant in a way that was scarcely well-bred, but something she could not resist had held her eyes. What was it? What did it portend or mean? Elinor could not say. She only knew that in a strange feeling of some mysterious affinity her heart went after the tall, slender woman in the carriage.

"How funny she looked at you, Elinor," said Pam, releasing Binky. "I thought she was going to speak to you, but she doesn't know us."

"No," said Elinor musingly.

"It was the old mistress," went on Pamela. "Doesn't she look cross? And she hates dogs. Hannah said I mustn't never, never let Binky run into the park, for if I did I might never see him again. Do you suppose the old mistress is an ogre, Elinor? she looks old enough and terrible enough to be a witch."

"Neither," said Elinor decidedly, for Pam's eyes were growing big and round. "Only a lonely old woman who has, perhaps, made lots of mistakes."

"Mistakes? I thought only boys and girls made mistakes."

"Are you hungry—suppose we have lunch?" said Elinor, who felt herself beginning to wade in deep waters, where Pam's questions so often led.

"I'm ravynous," said Pam. "I forgot the lunch. Yes, do let's have it. And Binky's ravynous too, aren't you, old man? Elinor, why is bread-and-butter so good out of doors, and so plain and ordinary in dining-rooms?"

"Because you taste the summer in every bite, and then you know what it means," said Elinor.

"Why, yes, my last bite tasted of wild roses, so they'll be coming soon. And this one tastes of paddling in streams. Oh, Elinor, do you know what I'm wondering?"

"No, I'm sure I don't," said Elinor.

"Well, I'm wondering if I won't see that silver barge some day. Do you suppose I ever shall? Wouldn't you like to very much?"

"I think it was a fairy barge," said Elinor.

"But, Elinor——"

Elinor groaned.

"Don't groan, Elinor; I only want to know. They don't have to forgive people in fairy-tales. Don't you remember what he said?

> 'When Devale is forgiven for love's dear sake,
> The silver barge will float on the lake.'

So there must be somebody that's not forgiven yet, and fairy-tales don't go on now, so it must be real, not fairy."

This logic was unanswerable, so Elinor said nothing.

"Do you suppose the old mistress has ever seen the barge?" asked Pam after a long pause.

"Never, Pam," said Elinor decidedly. "I don't suppose she ever believed in a fairy in her life, and of course you must believe in fairies before you can see one. But I should think the other lady has seen a thousand fairies, and often sees them now in the grass on moonlit nights."

"Should you? How do you know?"

"By the look in her eyes. But hurry up with your lunch, Pam. There's a cloud coming up, and it's time we were going. It's not quite spring yet, you know."

Pam disposed of the last bite of bun and followed her sister, while Binky, who was subdued since his mistress had nearly choked him, walked sedately beside them. They skirted the wood, and came out on the high road which led back towards Nestlecombe, and presently they were nearing the big gates of Nestlecombe Park.

Many a time in the last few weeks Elinor as well as Pam had looked up that long dark avenue of stately yews, and wondered what lay beyond—what kind of lives were lived in the old house whose chimneys could be seen amid the trees from the hillside fields. There were snowdrops growing in the avenue now, for even to that dark place the spring came.

Pamela's feet flagged as they reached the big gates, then suddenly she gave a bound forward, while Binky darted into the avenue with barks of glee and waddling leaps, as if he had sighted a friend.

Elinor glanced between the yew-trees, and was astonished and vexed to feel her own pulses quicken. For she saw a young man coming towards the gate with quick footsteps, a frown upon his face. He flicked the trees and even the innocent snowdrops with his stick as he came. Obviously, Richard Elkin was annoyed.

He heard Binky bark and looked up. Then he did not know how his frown disappeared, how his steps quickened, as he went towards Elinor. But she drew herself up ever so slightly and quite unconsciously, with the quick gesture natural to her when her spirit was touched. She only bowed, and looked beyond the yews, as she held Pam's

hand tightly, and drew the little girl away. She scarcely knew what she was doing, but she was responsible for the family ; and do what she would, the memory of Hannah's words came back to her every time Richard's face rose up in her heart. After all, what did they know of him, and who was there to tell them whether to make friends with this chance stranger whom Hannah thought had stolen the precious Madonna ?

Binky's nature was not a reflective one, but he remembered his friends. He ran barking down the country road after Richard, but the young man strode home in the direction of Salisbury with a dark look on his frank face. He had been as nearly cut as possible, and he vowed within himself that this proud, imperious maid should not have the chance to do it twice. Yet his heart was sore, and something had gone from the spring when he went in under the Close gate.

"Elinor," said Pam, as they reached the village, "that was the kind man that went after Binky. And you wouldn't let me speak to him."

"You want to speak to everybody," said Elinor. "You are getting a big girl, and you'll have to stop it, Pam. People who live in a little cottage like ours can't make friends with whoever they like ?"

Elinor blushed for her own reasons, but Pam pondered over them for some seconds.

"Does it make you a sort of nicer if you live in a great big house ?" she asked at length, as they went in at the gate of Jessamine Cottage. "Because our cottage is much cosier than Nestlecombe Hall must be."

"Of course not," returned Elinor, going up to her own room with troubled eyes. She hated what she had done, and search her mind as she might, she could find no reason for doing it.

"Elinor's cross, Hannah," sighed Pam, as the family friend came bustling out to receive them in a clean apron, with Antony's sock on her fist and a needle in her hand.

"Oh no, Miss Pam, you've looked the wrong side of her face," said Hannah. "And I expect you've walked too far, and both wants your teas. Come in the kitchen and you shall make some toast. What did you see when you was out?"

"We saw the old mistress," said Pamela promptly.

"The old mistress!" Hannah dropped the bread knife, and picked it up with hands that trembled. "Miss Pam—she didn't—see you?"

"Course not, but what if she had, Hannah? The lady with her did. And she stared awful hard at Elinor."

"I believe you," breathed Hannah, cutting a slice steadily. "And what next?"

"Nothing," said Pam. "Is she so very terrible and frightening, Hannah? I thought she looked like an old witch in the carriage, and she sat up so straight. I s'pose she never poked her chin when she was little."

"She's been up on a pedestal all her life, has old mistress," said Hannah; "and she climbed there herself. It's bad enough for ye when other folks puts yer there, but it's a deal worse when you put yerself on top, and call to them to kneel down below. Some of 'em 'll strike sooner or later, too."

"I don't understand you, Hannah," said Pam. "But I would love to see the lake under the dark trees, where the silver barge is to float. Did you ever think you saw it in those days when you were young and used to go into the park?"

"Not me," replied Hannah. "I was always fetching butter and eggs, or some such useful stuff as that. I'd neither time nor mind for such nonsense as fairy barges. There's a deal o' time wasted staring into water. It's like looking at yerself in them two-penny-halfpenny mirrors. Ye're safe to see yerself double and to think too much of what ye see. Look up at the stars if ye want somewhere grand to look at, and never mind slimy pools."

"But I think if I looked in I might see the silver thing carved at the end of the barge, and perhaps the silk sails, or something. Don't you think I might?"

"No, I don't, Miss Pamela, and I tell you what, you've got that barge on the brain, and we've heard about enough of it. Your questions—why, they would puzzle a parson to answer 'em, and I wish for once you would just try to fish things out for yourself, for no other mortal can do it for you. If you've been at it all this morning I don't wonder Miss Elinor got cross. Now have done, my lamb, do, or choose another subject."

"It's very curious," sighed Pam, holding her toast to the red fire, and looking into the heart of it. "Seems to me it's just the most curious thing I ever heard of, and yet it seems to make everybody cross. Well, I just will find out for myself. I'll go up that long dark avenue and I'll see what there

is. I don't care for witches, and ogres are awful old-fashioned. I don't believe there's any now, and I don't care if there is. I'd rather like to see one—and I shall go to-morrow. I hope—oh, I do hope I shall see the barge deep down below the water."

Antony came home from school in the gloaming with a long story that was already an enthusiastic one. He had found himself well placed in the third form, and the head had said he had been well taught and was forward for his age. His form master was "a grand chap," and there were some decent fellows, and he was sure he could do the work. As to the boy who had seen him at the gate that morning, why, Antony had learned that his name was Billy Barstow, and he was a farmer's son. He might know a turnip from a mangel wurzel, but he was no good at books. Antony concluded somewhat loftily that he did not expect to have much trouble with a chap like that.

Pamela listened to her brother's adventures with a proper amount of respect, but it was plain that she had something on her mind. Throughout the entire evening she did not ask one single question, and was so unusually quiet that Hannah became alarmed when she was putting her to bed.

"Poor little pet," she remarked to herself, as she folded the small skirts. "I doubt she's taken that lecture of mine too much to heart. And her mother far away in a foreign, not to say heathen land. I must give her some little extra treat to-morrow to make up, or we shall have her going after that there barge, and then—why, the band would tune up —that's all."

The Mystery Deepens

Hannah bent over the sleeping child, and smoothed her curls with a rough hand, but one as gentle as had ever touched little Pam.

"It's got silken sails," muttered the child, "has the silver barge."

"Bless my soul," said Hannah aloud. "And yet —no, I won't interfere no more. The hand of the Lord is in this, and we can but wait for His good time."

The next day was another of cloudless sunshine and waking woods. There was no wind in the well-sheltered village, and everything was still when Pamela looked out of the porch about three o'clock. It had been a busy morning, and Hannah was having forty winks in a rocking-chair before the kitchen fire. Upstairs in her bedroom, Elinor was writing a long letter to her mother, and making notes for a new romance which she had woven about the face of Miss Elizabeth Devale.

Pamela looked from right to left, between the two quaint yews, and past the flowering currant. There was nobody in sight but a stray cat washing her face in the afternoon sun, and she was not likely to interfere or tell tales.

Pam had shut Binky up in his kennel, and could hear him scratching to get out, but she took no notice as she put on her sailor hat and trotted down the village street.

Past the cottages, round the corner where the post office stood, and up the lane to the right, went Pam. Then she cut across the churchyard and found herself in the high road. There was the long red wall behind which lay the Hall gardens. There was the

first of the oak-trees in the park. And here was the wide open gate between its old mossy posts, that led up the dark avenue of yews.

There was no lodge beside the gate-posts, so nobody saw little Pamela stand still for a moment and then take a decided step into the gloom of the trees. She felt very little as she looked up at them, and saw their sombre tips so far above. What a long time they had been there, and how much, much older they must be than she was. Why, they must be as old as the old mistress herself, and Pam scarcely could think how old that would be—something almost past counting.

She wondered what the yew-trees were thinking about, for surely such old, living things that waved so wildly in the wind, must have thoughts of their own. But they also would be too old and wise for Pamela to understand.

Her heart was beating loudly, but she kept firmly on, and the snowdrops in the grass gave her courage. If such tiny white things were brave enough to grow there, surely she need not be afraid. And she was not afraid, for as she kept on through the green glades, nothing happened more startling than a fat brown rabbit scurrying across her path.

Presently she came to the end of the avenue, and the green ways divided on every side. She arrived at a white gate, but it opened easily, and very soon the path widened into a broad park, while she could see looming before her the old, dark, red-gabled house, covered with ivy, and with big wide windows opening almost to the ground.

There before her lay the magic lake, with the old

ruined tower on its bank. So still, so green, so deep it looked, with the slender birches growing beside it, the elms and willows touching its water with their branches. Here and there the slanting sunbeams came through the trees, and touched it into life and gold. But in the shadow it seemed too cool and dark ever to be ruffled.

Pamela approached softly, and stood by the bank She put out one little foot and touched the water with her shoe. But nothing happened, and she bent over in a sunshiny place to look deep into the water.

She only saw the reflection of her own round face and shining eyes. There were shadows across the lake, but they were thrown by the trees. Nowhere could Pamela see anything that she could even fancy was a silver barge with silken sails.

"Oh, I wish—I wish it would sail again," she said aloud. "But I suppose somebody has got to be forgiven before it can. I wonder—I do wonder who it is. If I knew them I would ask them to come quick."

Pamela looked up at the many gables and frowning chimneys of the old house. Somewhere within was the old mistress who had become, to the little girl, an object as romantic as her daughter was to Elinor. No fear of her stern old face haunted Pam, who had never found any face yet that did not lighten at her approach.

A sudden resolution came to her, and she nodded her curls. She would go up and find the old lady, and ask *her* about the barge. Surely she ought to know better than anyone else, and Hannah had made it pretty plain that *she* had no more to tell.

The Sail of the Silver Barge

Pamela went across the velvet grass where purple crocuses were springing. She looked with interest through the iron gate, and up the red brick steps that led to the octagon rose garden. Then she came to a wide Italian terrace, where cypresses grew, and which ran before the house. The steps were shallow, and easy to climb, and Pamela's feet made no noise. She went round the corner, and found flowers opening here, for she had come to the part of the house where the great library lay, in which Mrs. Devale spent her days.

Pamela stopped short. There before her was a great open window, nearly touching the ground. Just within, seated in a great armchair, was the lady whom Hannah always called the old mistress. She looked even taller and thinner and more severe than she had done in her carriage, and on her head she wore a large white cap of an old-fashioned kind, with flying strings.

But Pamela did not hesitate. She went up to the window, and tapped lightly with her little hand, but nobody took any notice. So stretching herself up on her toes, she put her head inside, and touched the old lady's sleeve.

"Will you tell me, please," she said in her clear piping voice. "Are you an ogre—or a witch? And if you are, don't you know where the silver barge has gone?"

CHAPTER V

PAMELA BESIEGES THE HALL

Towards great persons use respective boldness :
That temper gives them theirs, and yet doth take
Nothing from thine ; in service, care, or coldness,
Doth ratably thy fortunes mar or make.

—*George Herbert.*

MISS ELIZABETH DEVALE had found that March afternoon a strangely long one, though it was exactly like a thousand others that she had spent in the dim old library since those far-off days when she was a girl. Sometimes she wondered whether she ever had been a girl, who looked between the gate posts of Nestlecombe Hall, and speculated what the great world was like. She had meant to go out into it then, and do great things and learn greater ones. She had supposed that somewhere her own true knight would be waiting for her until the day when they should meet. But the gates had closed, although they looked so exactly as they did when Miss Elizabeth was a child. And the inward, unseen gate of life had closed upon her girlhood too.

She felt very tired this afternoon as she took her delicate embroidery and sat down in the large, lofty room. What a big place it was for two lonely people who had not very much to say to each other. There were plenty of small and cosy rooms in the great

house, but the head of the family had always sat in the library and Mrs. Devale would not depart from ancient custom. Miss Elizabeth sighed as she unrolled her work and looked at its gold threads and dainty stitches, and thought of the long hours it represented. She glanced across at her mother who sat beside the window, absorbed in her own fine work, and never heeding the delicate spring that was revelling across the park.

Like a wilful elf the sunshine was abroad, full of airs and graces, and the soft breeze came in through the window laden with something like youth. Miss Elizabeth had a sudden mad longing to throw her needlework out of the window, and to follow it, without ever looking back, up, up to the furthest hills. But instead she only sighed again as she searched for her thimble.

"You have sighed twice, Elizabeth," remarked her mother, raising her head for a moment from her work. "You have nothing to sigh for, and do not let me hear you do so again. Get to your work; I feel that I have been sadly hindered in mine to-day, and the light is soon gone in March."

Elizabeth said nothing, for she was well accustomed to hear the old lady speak as though she earned her bread by needlework. But her own fingers fell idle very soon again, and her eyes strayed to the long book-shelves that lined the walls. There were many treasures there, and they were familiar to Miss Elizabeth, who read them in those hours late at night when her time was her own. They were her only friends outside the village folk.

She had taught herself not to be lonely, and she

wondered why she felt so suddenly old and alone this afternoon, and why her heart went so persistently into the past. Nothing had happened to awaken those old dreams and desires which Miss Elizabeth had put away with all the other selfish things she had ever felt any inclination to do.

Yet had nothing happened? Well, there was the chair, of course, which had come from London, and which Richard Elkin had been so kind about, and had taken so much trouble to get. Miss Elizabeth wished her mother could have been more gracious, and not have told him that he was a fool for his pains, and so was she, to let him buy a chair like that.

It stood in the library now, and Miss Elizabeth looked across at it, knowing enough about old furniture to see that it was a beautiful specimen of Jacobean work. She knew also that her mother was well satisfied with it, and highly delighted with her purchase, particularly as it was almost identical with several old chairs which had been treasures at the Hall for generations. Indeed, there was something about this chair that was familiar to Miss Elizabeth, and she had a kind of feeling that she had seen it before, in her own old home when she was a child.

"But that would be impossible," she said to herself, as she bent over her needlework, and then, as she sat there in the waning afternoon, a long ago nursery picture came suddenly up into her memory.

She saw the old nursery upstairs in the sunniest wing of the house, and it was not a silent place then. It had rung with happy voices, shouting each other down, as children always did and always will. One of them had been her own, and she and her younger

brother had held the fort in the old chair that stood in the nursery then. But the eldest of them, the gay, wilful, determined maid who always won her way, and came out on top of obstacles—she had been the besieger, and she had gained the fort when the enemy tired of their play.

The little brother had long lain under the yew-trees within the churchyard wall. Miss Elizabeth never passed his grave on Sunday morning without a glance into the tender past. But the wild imperious bigger sister—Miss Elizabeth did not dare to think of her—or she could not go on with the monotonous life which it was her daily duty to live. It was only at night, when the house was still, that she whispered a forbidden name in her prayers.

Suddenly she put down her embroidery and crossed the room, treading softly, for the old lady by the window had fallen into one of those dozes which she stoutly denied. Her daughter put one hand on the chair, and turned it softly upside down. She caught her breath suddenly, as she saw what she knew she would find—a plate of iron that had been deftly fastened into the wood, where it had once been broken by rough usage.

"It is—it is the same," said Miss Elizabeth, going back to her seat. "It has come home again. It is our own old nursery chair—but how in the world? And what does it mean?"

Once again her work fell unheeded on her lap, and she sat looking into the fire. From the old chair her thoughts went to something that had haunted her dreams all night, and her waking hours since yesterday. It was only a girl's face, young and radiant, and giving promise of much beauty, but it was not the

beauty that had attracted this lonely woman. It was a certain look of brave pluck, a straight true glance from two dark eyes, which had been not only arresting, but haunting and familiar. Once, she had known just such a look on a different face. How did it come to belong to a strange, somewhat shabbily dressed girl, sitting by the Nestlecombe wayside?

Miss Elizabeth could not tell. There had been no mystery in her daily life for twenty years, and very little variety. In all that time she had scarcely left Nestlecombe, and had never once been in the busy whirl that meant London. Yet as she looked back, she did not see the little events of her daily life, she only saw its setting. The clouds had rolled far back, and her own spirit had touched with gold much of the sky under which she must live. It is the setting, not the facts, that make life wonderful or otherwise. Nobody may choose the facts, but all may set them for themselves, and Miss Elizabeth had set hers in gold.

Her feet were often in the mud, as she tramped about the country lanes, bringing comfort wherever she went, but her eyes were on the stars.

Somewhere in the silent Hall a great sonorous clock struck four. Mrs. Devale sat up suddenly, glanced at her daughter, and spoke severely.

"Stir the fire, Elizabeth," she said. "Why have you neglected it?"

"I did not want to disturb you, mother," said Elizabeth.

"Disturb me? What are you talking about? I was busy with my needlework. Four o'clock. Dear me, how the afternoon runs away. I must turn this corner by tea-time."

She sewed on steadily for five minutes, and then came that light step on the terrace, a pause, and Pamela's voice breaking the silence in the room with her shrill question.

It was followed by an intense silence, in which a little clock on the chimney-piece ticked fussily, as though anxious to warn the speaker and fill up the gap.

But Pam was not to be warned.

"Do you hear me, old lady?" she insisted. "Are you a witch? And have you ever seen the barge with your own eyes?"

Mrs. Devale turned slowly, as though she had become aware that some insignificant creature was disturbing the repose of Nestlecombe Hall. She looked the little girl without up and down, and Pamela bore the scrutiny easily. She liked to take people in from head to foot herself.

"What do you want?" asked the old lady slowly and awfully.

"Only to ask a question," and Pam leaned confidentially against the window-sill and smiled.

The terrible old lady saw the smile, and suddenly started. She pricked her finger with her needle, a thing she had not done for many years. And then she looked at Pam again.

But to her daughter's intense surprise she did not ring the bell and order a man-servant to remove the child who had suddenly sprung from nowhere.

"And who may you be?" she inquired in her most starchy tones. "Little girls do not come here asking impertinent questions as a rule."

Pamela drew her white brow into a frown.

"I don't know what impert'nent means," she said.

"But I do ask questions, I know, awful much. Hannah says it's on my brain; but you see, I do so want to know things, and grown-up people, they know such lots. My name is Pamela, but I am generally called Pam. And you are the old mistress—that is what Hannah calls you, so you see I needn't ask you who you are, because I know."

"The old mistress," said the old lady. "Hannah! Pamela! Why, child—my name is Pamela—how did you get that name?"

Pamela laughed. "I've always had it," she said. "'Spect I was born with it—but I didn't know grown-up people ever had names like us. I thought they were always 'Miss' or 'Mrs.' It is funny that you are called Pamela, like me."

"Hum! I see nothing humorous in that," said Mrs. Devale. "Pamela was a common enough name once, when people had more sense than to give their children names out of novelettes. But nowadays, girls have names that are more fit for dogs."

"Well, our dog's name is Binky," put in Pam. "Binky Tempest, because he is one of the family. I should have brought him, for I expect he is nearly knocking his kennel down, only Hannah said you might kill him, you hated dogs so much. But I am sure you couldn't hate Binky. The license costs seven-and-six, you know, but we simply had to bring him."

Once again the straight old lady stabbed her finger with her needle, and a tiny spot of red showed on the fine work she was doing. But she did not see it. A dim grey shadow had crept across her brow, and she looked out at the child who still leant against her window with strange yearning eyes.

"Binky—what did you say?" she asked abruptly.

"Binky Tempest. There's Elinor Tempest, and Antony Tempest, and Binky Tempest—and me. That's all of us, but Hannah, and she takes care of the cottage, and us too, only Elinor is growed up. She's nineteen."

"What cottage?" inquired Mrs. Devale, her strange dark eyes again on Pam's.

"Jessamine Cottage. We've been there for weeks now, and we do love it so, only sometimes we are lonely without mummy and dad."

"Oh—so you have parents. What are they about, pray, that they are not with you?"

"That's just why we have come," laughed Pam. "You see, daddy was ill, and the newspaper wouldn't have him any more. You have to be quite, quite well to write a newspaper, because you do it in the night when other people are in bed. The doctor said daddy must go a long way off to Switzerland, to get better among the snow, and there wasn't enough money for us all to go, so we came here with Hannah, and we are ever so jolly. She says there's a lot more fun where folks have porridge for supper than where they have stalled ox. I never tasted that, though, did you? It must want an awful big dish I should think. I asked Hannah if she thought you had it, but she said all tasted alike to you, because it was hunger sauce you lacked."

"Oh, she did, did she? And what else did she presume to say about me and my concerns, which are certainly no business of hers."

"Nothing much—only that you was lonely and mis'rable, because your garden walls were too high for you to see the common road. But you can see it, can't you, if you look through the gate."

Pamela Besieges the Hall

"Elizabeth," said Mrs. Devale suddenly, "ring the bell and order tea, and tell Bennett to bring some jam. Then lift this little girl in through the window. She cannot go home all that way without her tea, although she had no business to come."

Miss Elizabeth arose from her seat like one in a dream and rang the bell.

"Tea, please, Bennett, at once, with another cup, and some jam," she heard her own voice saying, while she noted the look of consternation that overspread the face of the middle-aged butler.

"I can get in myself, thank you," she heard Pam say. "I'm seven now, and I do most things for myself. I should like to stop to tea very much, and we don't have ours till five, so they won't miss me."

"Humph!" grunted the old lady. "They should keep their eye on you. Sit down there, and wait patiently."

Pamela did as she was told, and took her seat on a small carved stool within the bay of the big window. The spring sunlight streamed in after her, and made an aureole about her bush of hair. Nothing quite so young had been seen in that old room for many years, and it suddenly made everything and everybody look old and worn out.

Pam sat with her eyes on the face of the stern old woman before her, and wondered whether she had ever had roses in her cheeks, for they were like ancient parchment now.

Presently she burst into a sunny laugh that rippled round the walls, and seemed to astonish the ancient portraits. It echoed in the rafters above like something new and sweet never heard there before.

"I thought before I saw you that you were a witch,

But now I believe you are really a grannie. And there's quite a big, big difference."

Was it a faint pink flush that crept into the thin cheek of the old mistress? Was it a shadow of sorrow, of some unforgettable regret, that swept for a second into her eyes? Pamela did not see it, but Miss Elizabeth did, and her own heart leapt.

"No, no," said Mrs. Devale. "You talk nonsense, child. I am no grannie."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Pamela. "I really thought you were, and I've never seen a grannie only in pictures. I would have liked one so much. But Hannah says you can't have them unless Nature gives you one, and both Nature and grace robbed us of ours. I don't know what she meant, and Hannah never 'splains."

There came a sound at the door, and Bennett entered with a dainty tea-table. He put the muffins on the hearth, and the silver teapot on the tray with a flourish; then, not without a glance at the small guest, he went away wondering if the last day were anywhere near.

"Come near the fire, child," said Mrs. Devale, herself leaving her work and going up to the big fireplace. She held out her shrivelled hands to the blaze, and shivered slightly, though the next moment she pulled herself together. Pamela followed her, and her two plump pink hands were also held near the fire, while she smiled up into her new friend's face with great content.

"Isn't it cosy?" she asked. "I never thought you would ask me to stop to tea. Elinor says we can't expect to make friends with everyone when we live in a cottage, and she says I talk too much. I wonder—do you think she will be cross with me for stopping? I didn't think before."

Pamela looked across at Miss Elizabeth in the firelight with suddenly anxious eyes. But the lady reassured her.

"I don't think she will," she said. "We will send someone home with you to explain to your sister. And now make a good tea."

It was a very long time since anybody had ventured to make a good tea in the library of Nestlecombe Hall, but Pamela did so that afternoon. She sat on her little stool, still chatting away, and telling the family fortunes in a way that would have scandalised Elinor's very soul. But shut up with her own romance at Jessamine Cottage, Elinor knew nothing about it.

"Why," exclaimed Pam suddenly, when she could eat no more cake, "isn't that the old witch man up in that picture? The old man who used to float the silver barge, and who was so unkind to his son when he would love the people."

She left her seat and laid a plump hand on Mrs. Devale's black silk knee.

"You wouldn't have done that, would you?" she said. "You wouldn't have refused to have forgave your son because he was kind, I know. Do tell me—what does it mean? Why won't the silver barge come back?"

Mrs. Devale looked down at the small confiding hand, and her daughter trembled, but she did not push it away.

"There is no silver barge," she said.

"Oh, but there must be," went on Pam, "because there is the picture just as the man said in the train. And doesn't he look cruel? He must have been a witch man. He wouldn't ever have looked like a grannie."

Pam put her hands behind her, and stood in the firelight, looking up at the dark old picture in its

sombre frame. Such a gallant brave little figure she was, standing there on the rug, though it was both curiosity and mischief that had brought her there.

"Our ship," she said slowly, "isn't a barge with silk sails. Elinor says it's just a common fishing-boat, and it must wait for the tide. It's only gone out yet, but we are all hoping it will some day come in. Do you suppose it ever will?"

"I am quite sure it will," said Miss Elizabeth softly.

"Yes, Elinor says it will, and mummy—she thinks so too. But Hannah is not certain. Hannah says the people what write newspapers can't never paddle their own canoes."

"Hannah is quite right—shows sense," put in Mrs. Devale, who had returned to her work.

"Then I wish our ship was a barge," said Pam. "Because you pull those home with horses. And yours *is* a barge, you know. The kind man said it would come home when somebody was forgiven for love's dear sake. Do tell me who it is, will you? For I've been wondering and wondering, and I thought perhaps I could help you to find them. I know you would forgive them for love's dear sake, wouldn't you, if you knew who it could be. Do you know—old mistress?"

There was another silent pause, while the fussy little clock ticked, and Miss Elizabeth Devale, whose lips the years had sealed, heard herself breathing hard.

Then her mother spoke.

"Elizabeth," she said, "ring for Susan, and send this child home. She has been here long enough."

In silence Pam was helped into her coat, and her sailor hat placed gently on her curls. Miss Elizabeth

bent and kissed her with such a close touch and such clinging hands that Pam looked at her in surprise.

"There's something about you," she said, "that's like mummy. I've thought so all the time."

Miss Elizabeth kissed her again, and to her surprise Pam saw tears in her eyes. Then the little girl walked across to the old lady, who was working as hard as ever by the window. She leaned against her knee, and put up her face for a kiss. To Miss Elizabeth's surprise, she got one.

"Good-bye," said little Pam. "Good night, old mistress—and God bless you."

God bless you!

That was what the child had said. How many years was it since such a blessing had been breathed in the old library and from such innocent lips!

God bless you! Mrs. Devale put down her work and looked out across the wide park.

Was there a blessing on the old house—on the broad acres of her domain? She had not cared for many a long year whether there was or not. She had not asked God to bless her old home, of which she was so proud, since the day when He took her boy.

The old mistress looked out into the gloaming, where all the earth was young. She saw the daffodils awaking in the grass, she heard the thrushes singing. Beyond the terrace she could see the shepherd coming home, driving his sheep before him, and amid the flock, the tiny long-legged lambs were bleating beside their mothers. Everywhere except in the great silent Hall there was youth and love and hope. For all her seventy years, Mrs. Devale had a spring of strength within her. She did not mean to give up the reins yet, or to lay down

her life either. But it was long since she had seen the last of hope. A strong will and an angry memory were the forces that had kept her going.

But sometimes now she felt herself failing within, and knew that her spring of life would some day run dry. Then upon *what* would she lean? She could not tell.

God bless you! The old, simple, often formal words rang in her ears like a forgotten refrain that had come back with a new meaning.

God bless you! The old lady buried her face in her hands with a sob. "I can't expect God to bless me," she said. But the next moment she was threading her needle with a steady hand as her daughter came back into the room.

When Pam arrived at Jessamine Cottage, with a big bunch of daffodils, and accompanied by a middle-aged maid who brought apologies for keeping her, there was a sensation.

When the maid had gone, Hannah laughed and cried by turns, and hugged Pam until she expressed herself strangled. She utterly refused to explain her conduct, so Elinor was mystified as well as Pam, and it was only Dick Raven, when he came himself with the milk, who received a satisfactory explanation.

"It's the time of year for lambs," he said in an awestruck voice. "And you leave yours alone. She'll come, bringin' her tail behind her, and summat strange tied on to it, or my name ain't Raven."

"Just what I think," agreed Hannah. "You always was a man of sense, Dick, though you'd scatter it at times for all you was worth."

CHAPTER VI

IN AND OUT OF DIFFICULTIES

Life is a business, not good cheer,
Ever in wars,
The sun still shineth there or here,
Whereas the stars
Watch an advantage to appear.

—*George Herbert.*

ANTONY TEMPEST sat by the high road side on an April afternoon, feeling very miserable. His head was buried in his hands so that he could only see the mud of the road to Salisbury. His school books rested on the ground beside his boots, and altogether he was the picture of a boy who was "down on his luck," and sees no way out of that sore predicament.

Two or three great sighs burst from him as he sat, and public school boy as he was, it was certainly a rather dirty handkerchief, that he brought out of his pocket in order to wipe away a tear.

Something had happened to Antony, that was very evident—and something worse than the torn jacket, and the sharp cut that was bleeding on his brow and making his head ache badly. As he sat there, with the thick mud slowly oozing into his big boots, it was plain enough that Antony did not want to go home to Jessamine Cottage and tell all about it.

A grey cloud passed before the sun, and a chill swept into the April day. Beyond the trees Antony heard the village clock strike five. He thought he could hear the rattle of the teacups, and the kettle singing at Jessamine Cottage too. He must make up his mind to something, for sitting in a muddy lane all night would not tell him what to do.

With a mighty sigh he rose to his feet, and looked ruefully at his torn jacket. Perhaps Hannah might mend that, for she was wonderfully clever in making jagged tears invisible—but the ugly tear in the school record of Antony Tempest, made that morning! Who would mend that?

Suddenly he pulled himself together and set off at a run towards Nestlecombe. He was soon out of breath, for he never had very much of that, but he did not stop. Antony was afraid of his resolution failing before he reached the cottage.

Here it was at last, the primroses all out between the box borders, and a clump of wallflowers smelling so sweet under the window. Pam's little face was looking out, but Antony took no notice of her. He tore upstairs, and burst into the room where Elinor was generally to be found at this time of day.

She raised her eyes dreamily from the rickety old bureau scattered over with her papers. At first she did not see that it was Antony standing there.

"Oh, Elinor," he burst out, "I'm in a wretched scrape. I—I've tried to get out of it without telling you, but the man has been to the Head, and it all came out; and he says I must pay by Saturday, and I haven't a cent, and it will cost pounds, I am sure it will!"

A grey shadow crossed Elinor's face, and an old weary look came into her eyes. Far away among the snows, word had come that morning that the worn-out heart and brain of the tired writer were growing strong again. His wife had not ventured to tell him about the picture. This was no moment to distress either of them with new trouble. Whatever had happened now, Elinor must carry this burden herself. With a longing look at her romance, she laid down her pen.

"Tell me everything about it, Tony," she said gently.

"You are a trump, Elinor," said her brother. "You never rag a fellow. If you'd been some sisters, I'd just have run away and told nobody."

"That wouldn't have done any good, laddie," said the girl. "Now tell me."

"Well, it was all because of Barstow, and Hannah kissing me at the gate. She shouldn't have done it. He did see her, and though he said nothing at first, the chaps have been teasing me for days, and saying I was tied to a parcel of women. I didn't mind at first —at least, I tried not, and I spent all my tin at the tuck shop and went shares. But the other fellows have more than I've got, and they expect you to spend a lot. I—I've got into a bit of debt, Elinor, but I won't again. Truly I won't, for I see now it isn't worth trying to soap chaps up with that kind of thing. They don't think any better of you."

"I'm sure they don't," put in Elinor.

"Well! It was this morning at recess, and we had no business to go out into the street really, but we did. Billy Barstow got abusing my family, and he said heaps of horrid things, and even that we had come down here to hide ourselves, because father had run

away. The fellows shouted, and some of them thought it was sport, and I set on Billy. I was furious, and I split his lip open, and he bashed my head—you can see it bleeding yet, and it aches fit to split. But the worst of it was, we were close to a jeweller's window, and—and—we went through, both of us. As bad luck would have it, the man only put in new windows last week, and plate glass at that. They used to be little twopenny-halfpenny panes, that wouldn't have cost much, but these are as big as a sheet, and the man is as mad as a raving bull. He came to school this afternoon, and said things had been stolen out of his window too, and that he had lost pounds. So the Head made us tell all, and said we had been cads to break bounds and brawl in the public street, and that I must pay, because the man said it was me that went through."

Antony had lost all sight of grammar, and he ended with a sob. But though it was despair that was written on Elinor's face, her eyes smiled at her brother, and they were full of sympathy.

"Tony," she said, "you have been foolish, and lost your temper, and been ashamed of things that had no shame in them. And you have disobeyed, which is not quite honourable in a public school boy; but I think it was far worse to get into debt, than to fight for us, and break the window. I don't know how we are going to pay for it, but we must, and I shall have to find a way."

"But, Elinor," said Tony in an agony, "it's got to be paid on Saturday, or the Head will write to father."

"He must not do that," said Elinor, with firm lips. "Go and get ready for tea, Tony. I will think of a way."

The boy breathed a great sigh of relief as he turned his aching head and went to make himself respectable. He was more ashamed of his anger and his debts at the cake shop at that moment than any headmaster could have made him. In after years Antony Tempest became a champion of women who had nobody to stand by them. Perhaps that chivalry of his dawned in his soul on the afternoon when his elder sister stood by him.

Pam was the only one who talked much at tea-time, though there was no reproach in Elinor's face. It was all sympathy, as she bound up her brother's aching brow, and answered Pam's questions. But it was the kind of sympathy that made the boy feel worse than ever.

Not even Hannah could help in this trouble. Already she was doing a great deal of work for very little pay, and making every sixpence do the work of three. If she heard of the broken window, she would offer her own little store in the savings-bank, and Elinor was not going to be persuaded to touch that.

When Antony as well as Pam was fast asleep that night, Elinor sat in the silver moonlight beside the fire, while the clock ticked on, and wondered what to do Every penny of the money they possessed was carefully planned and needed. There was not one to spare for a broken window that would cost many. If only the precious picture had not been lost! Perhaps the jeweller would have taken it until they had saved the price of his window-pane.

A sudden thought struck Elinor. After all, it was a jeweller whose window was broken, and she had one great treasure of her own, which was surely worth the

price of a pane of glass. It was a miniature, delicately painted on ivory, of a maid of long ago—a great-grandmother of her own. It was set round with brilliants, and hung on a slender chain. It was Elinor's only ornament, and a great treasure, but it was worth less than Antony's honour and her father's health. At all costs he must keep his new-found peace of mind.

Elinor had decided. She went out to the kitchen where Hannah was winding up the clock and raking the fire together before she went to bed.

"Hannah," she said, "I would like to go to Salisbury to-morrow. I want to see the cathedral—and other things. Do you think Mr. Raven would drive me if he has room in his cart?"

"He'd be only too proud, Miss Elinor," said Hannah. "I'll just tell him to have all ship-shape for you, when he comes with the milk. A bit o' pottering round 'll do you good, and I dare say there's a deal o' pretty fancies in cathedrals, for them as knows where to look for 'em. Big draughty places, I call 'em, and not so clean as a rule, though Salisbury looks a deal more done up than most."

"It's too clean and light for me rather," said Elinor with a smile. "I like them dim and darkish, Hannah."

"Ah, yes, that's like a young lady, as never lived among dirt in her life. I wonder how ye'd like this here cottage wi' a nice dirty dimness over it all."

"I shouldn't like it at all," laughed the girl, as she went up to bed with a lighter heart.

It was only half-past one next day when Elinor climbed up among the milk cans that were going to Salisbury station and found a comfortable seat on a sack of potatoes and a cushion. Dick Raven regarded

it as a distinct mark of confidence from Hannah that he was allowed to drive Miss Tempest to town, and his rosy face shone like one of his own apples as, with a sprig of blossom in his coat, he whipped up his horse.

Dick Raven was not a man of many words, and Elinor was lost in thought; but he cast about in his mind for an entertaining topic. There was only one that came uppermost.

"There's a deal of apple-blossom coming out," he remarked with a sigh.

"Yes," agreed Elinor brightly, looking back towards the sweet sheltered village which was now a cluster of brown roofs amid the pink and white of blossom.

"Twenty years I've watched that there blossom come out same as ever," went on Elinor's charioteer, "and never thought to see her come back. It's always 'minded me of her on a washing day, for she was always such a one for clean clothes was Hannah. When I see 'em a-tossing so gay-like under the blossom, and it a-showering down over them aprons and sheets, I see Hannah behind 'em always. She had the same spirit as an orchard full of clothes a-drying in the wind—free and independent, and as bright and cheery as a winter fire—that's Hannah Snell, and always was."

This was a long speech for Dick, and he whipped up his horse with a deeper red on his open face.

Elinor did not know that he was blushing, but she did not smile. She saw romance wherever she looked at Nestlecombe, though sometimes it wore a sad-coloured gown. But here it was dressed in a beautiful and tender faithfulness that was the sweeter for being homely.

"When my father comes home," she said, "I'm afraid

we shall have to learn to do without Hannah. You deserve to have her, Mr. Raven, and I hope you will."

"You do, miss?" cried Dick, slapping his knee. "My, if I've got you on my side, Miss Elinor, Hannah and me, we may sit on each side o' the old hearth yet. If only she wasn't quite so terrible independent, and so set on you all."

"We must learn to be independent too," said Elinor.

"So I telled her. I said as every tub must stand on its own bottom; an' as for me, I'd stood waiting till my own tub was that encrusted wi' moss you couldn't see tub for green. But she only scoffed an' said she had no use for poetry in her kitchen. Poetry? I says. It's sound common-sense that is—it's no poetry. What has a plain man like me to do wi' poetry, Miss Elinor? When I see the good milk a-streaming like white silk into these here cans—that's all the poetry as ever I want or needs."

"Well, I do believe you think poetry, Mr. Raven, if you don't talk it," said Elinor. "There's poetry behind what you have said to me now."

"My, miss, is there?" asked honest Dick. "I'm scared to hear it. For if Hannah thought I'd fell into real poetry unbeknownst even to myself, she would give me the go-by for sure. Don't you tell her, miss, if you please."

"I won't," Elinor reassured him. "Will you put me down at the Poultry Cross, please? I have a little business in the town."

"Right, miss—and I shall be starting back near half-past five, when my empty cans has come. But I can wait any length o' time when so be as I'm driving a lady."

"I shall be there," said Elinor. "Thank you very much."

And she watched him out of sight, feeling that a friend had stepped from between herself and the world.

She found the jeweller's shop after some trouble. It had a large board fastened up before the window, and Elinor walked straight inside without waiting to let herself get nervous. She found a middle-aged man with a low brow and round head, polishing a tray of silver things, while a youth looked at her curiously from the back of the shop.

"Well, miss, what can I do for you?" inquired the jeweller, looking at the girl with more admiration than she liked.

"I—I—that is, I have not come to buy anything," stammered Elinor.

"Indeed!" The man's voice grew familiar, and the youth at the back of the shop laughed.

Elinor pulled herself together, and looked straight at the man behind the counter.

"My little brother was unfortunate enough to break your window yesterday," she said. "I have come to see you about it."

"He was," said the jeweller. "Though it was cussedness, not misfortune. It's my opinion he did it on purpose, the young limb. And it's got to be paid for, so don't think otherwise."

"I know it must be paid for," said Elinor, a deep flush sweeping into her cheek. "And I am sorry to say I have not the money at present. We are not well off, and my parents are not with us. My father is ill, and I cannot appeal to anyone." She raised her

eyes involuntarily, and in spite of himself, they appealed to the little man behind the counter. Elinor took out the beautiful miniature, and laid it down before him. "I have brought this," she said. "I want to know if you will take it instead."

The jeweller looked at the rare old thing, and knew that it was worth far more than a sheet of plate glass, and that he could sell it for more than its value to the Americans who flocked to the old city.

"This isn't a pawn shop," he said gruffly, and pushed it towards Elinor.

"I beg your pardon," said the girl. "But if you will not take it—I am afraid I must find a pawn shop."

And she turned to go.

"Stop a minute, miss," said the jeweller, in a voice that was meant to be friendly. "I don't often have pretty young ladies making such requests, so I can afford to listen to 'em sometimes." He took up the miniature and examined it in his big hands, turning it over, peering at the brilliants through his glass, and finally, unfastening it from its chain, he weighed it in his hand.

"You can leave it," he said. "It will cover the debt. I can't refuse a pretty face. And if you like to take ten shillings for the chain, I say you are welcome to it, so that's generous."

He leaned across the counter, and peered into Elinor's face, as he balanced half a sovereign on his finger and offered it to her. A great indignation swept into her heart, and a sudden anger with the man, with circumstances, almost with herself. Suddenly before her mental vision she saw the straight eyes and dark face of Richard Elkin. If only—if only—she

could have asked him to do this for her. She was sure that he would. But she had lost confidence in him, and then, how could she expose the family skeleton of poverty to a stranger, and one whom she had barely acknowledged the last time she saw him?

Yet had she lost confidence in Richard Elkin? As she stood, with trembling hands and beating heart, in the jeweller's shop, she recognised that she had found it, not lost it, and she was suddenly and strangely glad.

"You may take the chain," she said, with a quick, imperious gesture, putting the small gold coin away in her purse. Then without any other word she went out of the shop, and passed down the old street. She had learnt this morning the bitterest side of poverty—that it lays helpless people open to things that hurt their souls.

Elinor walked swiftly away, seeing nothing in the old streets, and not knowing where she was going. There was a tumult in her breast, and her breath came quickly, while sobs rose up and choked her. She felt, somehow, that her clean and delicate girlhood had been soiled, when she was spoken to by a man in such a way. She wanted to get away into a higher, purer place, where another touch should wipe it all out.

After a time she found herself, by a roundabout way, at the entrance to the Close, and she paused here as though she felt safe. The great trees were coming into delicate leaf, and everywhere there was the scent of earth, and the song of many birds. In the Close gardens the blossom was out, and the blood-red wallflowers lined the way. Everywhere in this haunt of old things and unforgotten memories, the revel and resurrection of the year had come.

But even here Elinor did not stay. She wanted to be under cover, where she might still her throbbing heart and cool her scarlet cheeks. She wanted to look up through silent, sacred spaces to something that held an atmosphere she knew.

So she started forward again, and went across the wide lawns, under the sweeping trees which have sheltered hearts that throbbed in bitterer times than ours. Then she gained the deep porch, and pushed her way into the cathedral.

It was not yet three o'clock, and nobody was there. The long aisles between the black and white pillars were silent and empty. The sunlight of April afternoon lay in patches of emerald and crimson on the floor. Elinor threw herself into a pew, and leaned her tired, aching head on the front. She had had little to eat that day, and it had brought her her first experience of a rough world in which she must take her place and stand alone. It was only a little incident and soon past, but it assumed big proportions to Elinor. If the family fortunes did not turn, there might come a terrible time when such happenings grew commonplace. Generally a big hope, that came from a world out of sight, held Elinor fast, while a fine strain of pluck that belonged to her nature looked out of her eyes. But this afternoon both had forsaken her, and in the great empty cathedral she put down her head and burst into bitter tears.

Ten minutes earlier Canon Elkin had awakened, refreshed in body and spirit, from his afternoon nap, and strolled to his library window. He looked out across the Close with a smile, and something stirred at his old heart that was very like youth and spring-

time. Nobody in England loved the waking of the earth and the uprising of the flowers more than the old Canon. Nobody saw the years pass with less regret, or loved the seasons more as they passed. In every spring he saw a joyous symbol of that great resurrection to which each one brought his spirit nearer.

> "These are Thy wonders, Lord of love,
> To make us see we are but flowers that glide;
> Which when we once can find and prove,
> Thou hast a garden for us where to bide,"

he quoted from his favourite poet, as he watched the afternoon shadows creep across the lawns. Just so they had lain when George Herbert came that way to evensong, he pondered, and a reverie of the past stole over him, as it did on most quiet gentle afternoons. But suddenly something arrested him, and he looked with a boy's eagerness towards the cathedral. Who was that tall slender girl who was hurriedly crossing the Close? She was nobody known to him, and yet he knew every maid in the place, surely, and something in her bearing and the turn of her head was as familiar to him as his own. Ah! but it was not familiar in the way that things became known to him now. It belonged to the old dead years that had held a different charm, and he could not account for it, because this girl was but a maid herself.

She disappeared into the cathedral, and something about her told the Canon she was in trouble. He went out into the hall, and taking his tall old hat, brushed it carefully, and put it on. Then, stick in hand, and with his white head a little on one side as his custom was, he set out across the Close.

He wondered why his old heart was beating as he

drew near the cathedral, and why he pushed open the door with such a sense of expectancy. At first there seemed nobody within, and he thought he had been deceived. Then as he went silently down the long aisle he loved, looking up at the shining windows, and thinking again of his saint, he heard a stifled sob. He stopped short, and there close beside him sat Elinor, lost to all the world about her, and still weeping nervous tears.

Canon Elkin had never been a conventional man when he was young, and he was still less so now that his head was white and many privileges were his. He had never seen a young thing in sorrow without wanting to help, and he could not do so now.

He bent down, and laid his thin white hand on Elinor's shoulder.

"My child," he said, "what is the matter? Can I help you?"

His voice seemed to come to Elinor from some far place that did not belong to earth. She was startled, but when she looked up, it would appear that some spirit of the old cathedral had stepped back to speak to her. For weeks she had held no converse with any but Hannah and the two children, and the cultured voice and beautiful face of the old man carried a comfort of their own. It almost seemed to Elinor that here was George Herbert himself come back to the place he loved, to help other people.

As for the Canon, when Elinor looked up he did not see the face of a stranger. He saw the dewy eyes of another girl who had looked at him just so many years ago.

"Nell!" he said softly, but Elinor did not hear him.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said confusedly, getting up, and dashing away her tears. "Is—is it against the rules to cry in a cathedral? I was so tired—and something worried me."

The old man smiled at her. "Do you know George Herbert?" he asked, in the familiar way one would speak of a friend. "Perhaps he wrote this verse where we are standing. At any rate, we may think so. Listen!

> 'Groans are quick and full of wings,
> And all their motions upward be;
> And ever as they mount, like larks they sing;
> The note is sad, yet music for a King.'"

"Yes, I do know George Herbert," said Elinor. "I came here to-day to meet him over again."

"You did—I don't often hear a young girl say that." Canon Elkin's rarest smile flashed out. "Will you let me take you round this beloved old place? You do not know me, but most people here do. They call me the old Canon, and that is my house you can see from the porch—over in the corner. It has a bit of a garden round it."

"Thank you so much," said Elinor, with her own charming smile, as she recognised that he was giving her his credentials, and the half-hour that followed was one of the pleasantest she had ever known. She forgot the jeweller's shop and Antony's scrapes. She forgot the family troubles, and her own fears. She even forgot the time, but when they came out once more on to the mellow old lawns it was only chiming four. They paused, and the girl held out her hand, but Canon Elkin did not take it.

"I wonder now," he said, "whether you would give an old man a rare pleasure, and take tea with him before

you go. We were strangers an hour ago, but your face is strangely like one I knew twenty years ago."

Elinor only hesitated for a second.

"Thank you, I should like to have tea with you very much," she said. "And the milk-cart does not go back to Nestlecombe until half-past five."

"Nestlecombe?" said the Canon eagerly. "You are at the Hall?"

His tone was almost excited, but Elinor shook her head. "We are at Jessamine Cottage," she said, "while my parents are abroad. Our old servant is a native of Nestlecombe. That is why we came here."

A sudden gleam of understanding came into the old man's eyes, but he said nothing as he piloted Elinor across the Close, and opened his garden door. The scent of the wallflowers came out to meet them with a wonderful welcome, and the first rose of summer was opening its buds on the old red wall.

"Oh! A rose—how delightful," exclaimed Elinor. "It is the first I have seen growing for years."

"Ah! We have looked long for that rose—my boy and I. We have wooed it open. Do you remember what Dean Hole said? If you want to grow beautiful roses, you must grow them first in the heart."

"That was beautiful," said Elinor. "I have often thought there are flowers that will only grow for those who love them."

"Yes—mignonette is one of them. Rich men's gardeners court it in vain, but it blooms in cottage plots—and the cosy campanula! That hangs in humble windows, and disdains a conservatory. But I am growing as garrulous as ever. Come in—come in, tea will be ready in the library."

Elinor followed him into the rich old room, gracious with the treasures of the past, and filled with the echo of bygone personalities. He gave her a seat in the deep window, and himself sat opposite in a high carved chair. Elinor looked at his face, which had grown so beautiful in age, because of the march of his thoughts, and an echo of George Herbert crossed her brain too. She remembered what Dr. Donne wrote about the poet's mother. It might have been said of this old man:

> "Nor spring nor summer beauty has such grace
> As I have seen in an autumnal face."

Canon Elkin turned and poked the fire.

"There is a chill in the air yet," he said. "And Richard likes a glow to greet him, though you young folks do not know yet what company a fire can be to a lonely heart. Was it not St. Francis who spoke of his little sister, the fire? That's what a cheery blaze often is to somebody—a little sister."

"I don't know," answered Elinor lamely, for her heart had suddenly begun to beat like a hammer. Richard? Who could Richard be?

Her companion told her.

"Ah! There he is," said the old man cheerily. "There's Richard coming home from work, though he does not carry his tools on his back. Will you dispense the tea, Miss—er?"

"Tempest—Elinor Tempest."

"I am not surprised," said Canon Elkin gravely, although he did not explain what he meant.

When Richard Elkin came home that day, he was conscious in the hall of something strange and wonderful in the old house. He paused outside the library

door, and a sudden sound came to him. He heard a woman's laugh—low, sweet, and yet thrilling, the laugh of a gentlewoman, but also, to Richard, a laugh that he had heard once, but that echoed for ever. He opened the door with something in his face that did not escape the Canon. There, in the deep window-seat, with the sun in her hair, and laughter in her eyes, sat Elinor Tempest, with a teapot in her hand, filling a cup for him. He had not seen anything so heart-satisfying since he could remember.

He strode across the room, never hearing his uncle's introduction.

"Miss Tempest!" he said. "How——" Richard paused.

"How did I get here? You may well ask. I found a friend in the cathedral, and he brought me here."

"Ah! Uncle has often done that—but never before—I'm so glad."

Richard sat down, his mind in a state of chaos, and Elinor's eyes fell, she scarce knew why, to the cup she was filling.

"So you have met before," cried the old Canon in delight. "What a sly jade fate is; and my elaborate introduction, which Richard did not hear, is superfluous. It's time I went on the shelf, I think, like a cracked old jar."

"Cracked old jar, uncle?" said Richard. "You mean a pot pourri jar, always giving out scent."

The Canon laughed, and his eyes twinkled. Richard was not wont to burst into poetry.

"That was very pretty, my boy, very pretty," he said. "But don't waste your time paying compliments to an old man. I begin to think this must be your

travelling-companion. How is the little sister, Miss Tempest?"

"And Binky Tempest, how is he?" put in Richard, with perhaps just the faintest reproach in his voice, though his heart was singing. Elinor would not be sitting here pouring out tea if she had meant to cut him in the lane. But stay! Perhaps she had not known that the Canon was Richard Elkin's uncle.

"Pam and Binky are both quite well," said Elinor, but her eyes told Richard she had heard the reproach in his voice, and when her heart was touched Elinor's eyes would always say more than her tongue. There was a moment's silence while a lark sailed across the Close, and the Canon's words came back to the girl. Her tears of that day had indeed found that they possessed wings.

"I am afraid I must go," she said. "My driver will be waiting."

"May I—walk there with you?" asked Richard.

"But it is a milk-cart," announced Elinor, turning towards Canon Elkin.

"Many a good ride to Nestlecombe I've had in one," said the old man. "You're a sensible girl. Will you come again?"

"I will," said Elinor. "And perhaps I may bring Pam. You would like my little sister."

"I like any kind of little girl," answered the old man. "But particularly those with sweet old-fashioned names. Good-bye, my dear. You will let me say so. And you won't forget that, when the note is sad, it is yet music for a King."

No! Elinor's eyes were full of tears, as she went out with Richard, but they were happy, comforted ones.

Richard did not say much as he piloted her towards the station, and she too seemed robbed of the power to speak. But as they reached the slope below the waiting milk-cart, he took her hand to say farewell. She hardly knew that he held it fast.

"Why—did you cut me the other day?" he demanded, a longing hunger in his eyes.

Elinor started, and the colour left her lips.

"I—I hardly know," she said simply, for Elinor Tempest had no coy airs. "You see—I didn't know whom to trust, and Hannah had said——"

"Oh, was it that old dragon?" Richard's voice was tremendously relieved. "You won't cut me next time, will you? Don't you think—couldn't you trust me next time?"

Elinor laughed, as she drew away her hand.

"I'll trust you every time," she said, and the words rang in Richard's ears all the way home, and throughout the long evening, while his uncle talked to him about a new book which bore upon George Herbert's day.

Richard only thought how old he was, and how far he had left love behind him. Yet the Canon looked long into his bedroom fire that night, and made a confidant of it, because he was a lonely man. He had learnt two things—Richard's heart, and Elinor's history.

Dick Raven looked somewhat surprised when he saw Elinor with a companion, but Mr. Richard Elkin was known to him, and his uncle was one of Dick's saints.

"If ever me and Hannah gets married," he confided to Elinor on the way home, "the old Canon shall tie the knot. My, I shouldn't feel married proper if he didn't do it; but I only wish he had the chance. He's married all as I've ever knowed, and Hannah,

she would like to have him, I know. Why, she must ha' telled ye all about that summer morning when he married your father and mother before breakfast, in Nestlecombe Church. I mind it yet—how the dew sparkled, and how kind he was. Twasn't many couples he would ha' married without their folk's consent, but he was on your ma's side, was the Canon."

Elinor did not think she heard aright. There was a buzzing in her ears and a burning in her cheek. Canon Elkin and her father and mother, and Nestlecombe Church on a summer morning. What could they have to do with each other?

"Mr. Raven," she said, "I don't know what you mean. What have my father and mother to do with Nestlecombe?"

Dick Raven sat back in his own milk-cart and stared at Elinor.

"You don't mean to sit there among them cans, and tell me as ye don't know," he said.

"Indeed I do," said Elinor piteously. "I don't know anything about it."

"The Lord help ye, "cried Dick. "Well, they have made a babby of ye. And my, I shall catch it when Hannah knows as I've been the one to let pussy out of the bag. But you go home and ask her, Miss Elinor. You make her tell you the whole story—why, there's a many in the village as looks at you and Miss Pam, and knows by your faces who you are—but Hannah's that close with you."

"Here is the cottage," said Elinor, in a quiet voice, getting down in a kind of daze. "Yes, Mr. Raven, I shall ask her about it to-night. Hannah must tell me the story."

CHAPTER VII

A WONDERFUL STORY

Wilt loose the chain,
And wake thy sorrow?
Wilt thou forestall it; and now grieve to-morrow.
And then again
Grieve over, freshly, all thy pain?

—*George Herbert.*

THE clock in the mellow old church tower struck nine. The village was very quiet, for even the thrushes were silent until dawn. Elinor had finished her simple supper, and could hear that Hannah had put it away, and was rocking herself to and fro before the kitchen fire. It was the time when her busy being was at liberty, and Elinor seized it.

She crossed the little passage, and opened the kitchen door. Hannah looked up from her knitting at the girl as if she knew that something for which she had long waited was coming.

"Well, Miss Elinor," she said. "Well—and what is it?"

Elinor had a short blue skirt of Pam's in her hand, and she sat down to mend it in the pleasant kitchen opposite Hannah.

"I'm tired of my own company," she said. "And I want to ask you something."

"Yes"—but Hannah sounded strangely breathless and perturbed.

"Do you think we ought to let Pam go roaming up to the Hall? It would be different if Miss Devale had come to see us, or even if they made friends with me now. But they don't do either, and they may think it strangely intrusive and pushing of us not to keep Pam at home, and perhaps they do not want her. I believe she has been there this afternoon while I was away."

Hannah clicked her knitting-needles, and counted her stitches as she turned the heel of Antony's stocking.

"She has, Miss Elinor," she remarked at last. "I see her trotting up the lane myself, and I didn't do nothing. Every inch o' Nestlecombe is safe for a little girl, thank the Lord, and I see His hand in this. Don't you interfere, love, and some day you may be glad."

Elinor laid down her work.

"Hannah, I hate mysteries, and I am tired of them. I thought we should have left them behind in London, and I am not a child. I have to help to carry the family burdens, and I want you to tell me something. Why do you try to keep us from talking to the village people? Why do they stare at us and whisper when we have passed? And you must tell me—what had my father and mother to do with this place? And how did old Canon Elkin know them?"

Hannah nearly bounded out of her rocking-chair as she seized its arms, and looked at the girl opposite to her.

"Miss Elinor! My lamb!" she said. "You *are* asking questions."

"I am, Hannah," said Elinor firmly. "And I want an answer."

"I'll be bound it wasn't the old Canon set you on this."

"No, it wasn't—though he too looked at me as if he knew me."

"Then it was Dick Raven—wretched man. Talk about women ; show me the man as can keep a quiet tongue in his head, and I should be glad to know him, that's all."

"You mustn't blame Mr. Raven. He had no idea that I did not know. And it is not very nice, Hannah, to feel that there is some mystery which concerns me, and that everyone is keeping it from me. I want you to tell me."

Hannah rocked for a few minutes in silence. Then she opened her mouth.

"Mebbe you are right," she said. "And your ma, she said to me last thing, 'Hannah,' she says, 'if anything arises, tell Elinor the truth. I think perhaps I ought to have told her myself before I let her go.'"

Elinor was silent, and there was a long pause in the cream-washed country kitchen. A coal fell apart in the fire, and the clock ticked on, but still Hannah, who was never at a loss for words, did not seem to know how to begin.

At last she put down her knitting, and leaning forward, laid her hard toil-worn hand on Elinor's. "My lamb," she said, "your rightful home at Nestlecombe isn't Jessamine Cottage. It is the Hall, where your grandmother, the old mistress, lives, and Miss Elizabeth, your aunt."

"Hannah!"

"Yes, Miss Elinor, you may well say that, but it's all true. Once, twenty years ago, Miss Nell, your mother, lived there. Sometimes it only seems yesterday she stole out across the Italian garden and the park, and through that green wooden door ye've often seen, to marry your father. It was a summer morning, and the long grass was full of dew, for I mind how she

wet her little boots, and your father he dried 'em that tenderly. Yes, and the old Canon it was that married them. If you was to look through the register o' Nestlecombe Church, you would see it for yourself."

"Tell me all," said Elinor.

"There isn't a great deal to tell," went on Hannah. "It's just a story such as many an old house knows, but it's happened again and again at Nestlecombe since that barge went sailing away, as Miss Pam has got such a strange fancy for. The old mistress was a stern mother. She is yet, for all that, and she keeps Miss Elizabeth as tight as she ever kept Miss Nell. She would have liked to see 'em sitting on each side of her with their needlework for evermore, and love—she didn't hold with it. She was proud as proud could be, but she had a heart once, folk said, as were old enough to know. But she buried it in your grandfather's grave, and hasn't never let the world see a glint of it since."

"Poor thing!" said Elinor. "Poor grandmother!"

"Ay, poor thing, true enough. Hers was broken hopes. Poverty don't really hurt you when you're young, but you can't live without hope, Miss Elinor. Broken hopes is like smashed eggs. You may make something else of 'em, even something better. But they'll never be eggs again."

Elinor looked thoughtfully at Hannah. Life had not broken any of her hopes yet, or made them into something else.

"There was a man," said Hannah again, resuming her knitting. "And he came and wanted to marry Miss Nell. He was as rich as Creases, or some such character, but he wasn't good. Either old mistress didn't know that, or she wouldn't believe it, or her

eyes was blinded by pride, for he was a lord. Yes, Miss Elinor, a live lord. Your ma might have been a ladyship if she hadn't put love before everything else."

"I'm glad she did," put in Elinor.

"You are young, love, like she was then, but for all that you are right. And though she keeps it hid so well, old mistress may have come to think the same. Mothers as won't forgive their children and take them back, ain't no better than stepmothers, to my way o' thinkin'. But there, you don't find many of 'em. And I'm an old maid, so what do I know about it?"

"A good deal; haven't you brought us up?" said Elinor.

"Well, I reckon I've helped," said Hannah, much flattered. "And I've a pair of eyes. Sometimes they are worth as much as a bit of experience to some—that is, if you use 'em. But to go on with my story.

"Well, all that summer there had been a gentleman down here at Nestlecombe, lodging in one of the cottages, and writing bits o' things for papers about spring, and such like, and putting in the Nestlecombe folks too, and they didn't always like it. Canon Elkin was vicar here then, and him and the young man got friends. The Canon thought a deal of him and a book that he was writing, but said he wrote what was too good to sell. That writing gentleman was your pa, Miss Elinor, and I could wish for all your sakes that it had been pigs or milk, or something as you could get at, instead of books that he came down here for. But it's always books with your pa. A nicer gentleman or a kinder never stepped; but there, my dear, a fortune never will come his way."

"No," said Elinor, "father wouldn't stoop to that. And we have always been happy."

"You have, love, happy and brave. But I would like to see your mother's face as it once was, though it's a nobler one to-day. You may have to stoop to get fortins, but they are useful things for liftin' you up above some o' this world's cares."

"I believe you would have liked mother to marry the lord," said Elinor.

"No, indeed; I couldn't a-bear that lord. He was as soft as my pocket—no brains. I was parlour-maid at the Hall then, and proud of my place, for we was faithful servants in those days. So you see I saw it all, Miss Elinor, and I can see Miss Nell's face now as she come back across the park and in at the library window one summer evening. She had a bunch of roses in her hands, and there was something better than roses even in her face. She had told the writing gentleman, meaning your pa, you know, that she would marry him.

"That night she gave the go-by to his lordship, and old mistress, she sent her packing to her own room like a child. She would ha' liked to shut her up as they did in old times, but the Canon, he was on Miss Nell's side. He come up to the Hall, and he talked to old mistress. But it wasn't no good. She telled him to mind his own business—yes, that she did—and him the vicar of Nestlecombe."

"Dear old man," said Elinor. "Why haven't we known him all these years, Hannah?"

"Why, you must know, love, he wasn't old in them days. He's not so old now as he looks. And after he had married your parents on that summer morning, old mistress had him turned away from the doors of the Hall, and never went near the church herself, nor allowed Miss Elizabeth. Then Canon Elkin was ill,

and he gave up his living, and went abroad for some years. Your pa took his failures to heart that much, and the poverty he thought he had brought on you all, and I suppose he lost sight of his old friends. Anyway, your mother did not know the Canon was back at Salisbury, or I am sure she would have written to him—except that she hoped nobody would know you here—but she forgot your faces, and village memories. They are not like Londoners down here. They know their friends again."

"And that is why we came to Jessamine Cottage?"

"Yes. Fortunately for all concerned, this little house belongs to your ma, along with a hundred a year which her godmother left her. Nobody could prevent her having that, and it has often kept the family."

"I wish I could earn some money," said Elinor with a sigh. "I shall try to when father comes home again."

Hannah tossed her head. "It's not for the likes of you to earn your bread," she said. "And I don't believe you'll ever have to. But if so be as you do, keep off that nasty ink, Miss Elinor, do. I see you a-scribbling away in the afternoons, and my heart fails me. You are going the same way as your poor pa, and you'll have the same disappointment. Do see if you can't find something useful, love."

"But I love writing, Hannah—I love it better than anything. And there's a prize offered in the local paper for a story. It's two guineas, and I'm having a try. I mean to win it if I can. Think of earning two guineas. I'll read you the story when it's finished, and I'm sure you'll like it."

Hannah groaned. "It's in your blood for sure,"

she said. "To think of old mistress's grandchild writing for the public papers."

Elinor drew herself up in the homely cottage kitchen and looked across at her old friend.

"Hannah," she said, "I am Roger Tempest's daughter long before I am kin to Nestlecombe Hall. And as for writing for the papers—I only wish I had the chance and could do it."

"You are growing up, Miss Elinor," was all that Hannah said in reply. "And it's not to be expected that you should think of them old days as I do. When I see your mother a-getting up your pa's collars, and Miss Pam's little things, my heart goes back to the old days in them grand old rooms. Maybe you'll see 'em some day—then you'll understand."

And Hannah remembered what Dick Raven had told her when he brought the milk at dusk—how he had sat in his cart and waited while Richard Elkin said farewell to Elinor, and held her hand, as Dick had put it, "more than a thought longer nor what he need have done." Hannah was suddenly weighted with the responsibility of the Tempest family.

"Mischief I naturally expected, and maybe worse, seeing it was Miss Pam and Master Tony I had to mind," she said to herself. "But neither her ma nor me ever give a thought to such a thing as a young gentleman falling in love with Miss Elinor. But we might ha' done if we'd looked twice in her face. But there—it wasn't a growed-up face to us, nor ever will be, bless her."

Both Hannah in the rocking-chair, and Elinor opposite, had sunk into a reverie. Elinor's thoughts had gone behind the high red walls of Nestlecombe Hall, but they did not people the old house out of the past. They played

round that tall, dim, aloof figure of Miss Elizabeth, who had touched her romantic heart in the lanes. Surely she had not helped to turn her sister away because she loved a poor man instead of a bad one?

"Hannah," she said suddenly, "did Miss Elizabeth —my aunt, I suppose, but it seems so strange—did she help to turn mother adrift?"

"Why, child, what it is to be young," returned Hannah. "Can't you look into her sad face and see that she is years younger than your mother? She was away at school, and knew not a thing about it, until she came home and found her sister gone, for Miss Nell would not mix her up in it by telling her. She was forbidden to speak of her sister ever again, and from that day to this, they have never met. You can get a new friend—maybe, though I doubt it, and a new wife for certain—but you can never get a new sister, Miss Elinor. Whatever yours does—don't you let her go by."

"Little Pam! I should think not. Do you know, Hannah, I don't want that stern old woman to belong to me, but I should love to have Miss Elizabeth. I fell in love with her in the lane beside the wood. I've been longing to talk to her ever since. How terribly lonely her life must be."

"Yes, yes, lonely enough, I don't doubt, child. But remorse is worse to carry through the years, when you can't speak of it, than just the pain of loneliness. I doubt Miss Elizabeth has fitted her back to its burden, and asked the Lord's blessing on it, too, in a way old mistress could never bring herself to do—and hasn't the right to. But I see her in the carriage the other day. Don't you tell me she carries a sore heart and a broken spirit, for I know it."

"I only thought how cross she looked," mused Elinor.

"You are nineteen, love, and I'm past forty. And I see clearer things in Nestlecombe faces than if I'd been with 'em always. Time glides on wonderful even in the blessed country, and leaves fewer marks, but you get a sort of wrapped up inside yerself as isn't always good. For me, it would be easier to bear my sorrows under the sky and the trees, and where the wild flowers grows, but you may give me London for getting away from myself and livin' in other people. When ye see the motor 'buses and the taxi cabs at 'Yde Park Corner, your heart's that in yer mouth for all the folks, you ain't got a second to think o' your own place—and so it is all along."

"Yes—that's true enough," agreed Elinor. "You do sort of take yourself to pieces and look at the parts, where it's quiet—but you learn to fit them together again, I think."

"You do," said Hannah. "And the key's called content. Yes, Miss Elinor, you are growing up, for sure, and I was hasty when I complained of you picking up some chance person in the train. I didn't know it was the Canon's nephew—and a fine young gentleman on his own account too, I suppose, from what Dick Raven has a-told me. But there's the old clock striking ten —time you was off to your beauty sleep, love."

Perhaps Elinor was glad at that moment of her lifelong habit of obedience to Hannah. She got up and went over to the rocking-chair.

"Hannah," she said, "you have told me some wonderful things to-night. But you have not told me how you came to be part of our family fortune. I should like to know that."

"Lack-a-day, child, there's no how about it. I told you I was parlour-maid, but it was Miss Nell I had always loved, and when she went the Hall was a blank place. At first she used to write to old mistress, for she never thought she would cast her off for always. But her letters was never answered—and then one day one come to say that you was born, and to beg your grannie to see you. But it weren't no use, old mistress was like granite, and when I heard the news, and how Miss Nell was at top of a London flat, why, I couldn't help it. I just went into that great library and I give notice. Then I packed my things in one o' them old wooden boxes lined with wall-paper—as girls is too proud to travel with now—and off I went to London, and stayed for good. The rest you know yourself, Miss Elinor."

Elinor bent and kissed the woman who had toiled, saved, and suffered for the Tempest family.

"I do," she said. "Tony and Pam and I have had two mothers. We shan't ever forget it, Hannah."

"Bless you, Miss Elinor, I know you won't," said Hannah, wiping away an unaccustomed tear. "And now get off to bed and let me do the same. It's baking day to-morrow."

Elinor went upstairs slowly, and paused at the little window on the cottage landing. The moon was full, and away across the village street she could see the high red wall of the park, the slender tips of the cypresses in the Italian garden. She had a part and a share in it all. Her pulses stirred at the thought. Something old and traditional tugged at her heart, and she heard the old inherited call of kinship that comes at such unexpected times and in such unaccustomed places.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GILT BIRDCAGE

I travelled on, seeing the hill where lay
My expectation.
A long it was, and weary way.
The gloomy cave of desperation
I left on the one, and on the other side
The rock of Pride.

—*George Herbert.*

IT was a midsummer afternoon when Pamela first saw the birdcage. She was a well-known figure in the village of Nestlecombe now, trotting about by herself with Binky at her heels, and many a long conversation she had with the blacksmith at his forge door, the rosy-faced woman at the gardener's cottage, or Dick Raven, as he marshalled those shining milk-cans which were his delight and Pam's admiration.

The little maid had been shut up with a cold for some days, and it was quite a fortnight since she had run in at the green wooden door, across the park, and looked in over the low window-sill where old Mrs. Devale sat seemingly for ever with her needlework. Pam had asked her once if she ever went to bed.

Up to this afternoon Pamela had not ventured to take Binky up to the Hall. Some instinct which she could not have explained, told her he would not be at all welcome in the great library where anything so noisy was never heard, and where Pam's own voice

woke almost startling echoes in the heavy beams, and lingered there after she had gone. But to-day Binky sat on his hind legs, and cocked up his ears, and pawed the air in a coaxing fashion that could not be denied. He too had not had a good run for a fortnight, so Pam patted his shaggy ears and told him that if he would be good and quiet, he should go.

"We'll keep to the narrow path under the trees, and I shall have to take you on a leader, because the old mistress would be angry if you ate up the games," Pam admonished him.

Binky pricked up his ears, and barked his hardest, as if to assure Pam that his intentions were of the best. But she felt a little dubious about him, as she opened the door in the wall, and led him into the green glade inside.

It had been very hot in the sheltered village. The apple-blossom was gone now, and the trees were a deep green, while a still midsummer haze shimmered over the ponds and the gardens where roses were opening their crimson hearts and showering their petals all day.

Pam had been heavy and languid all the morning, and could not eat any dinner. But as soon as she went through the little door into the park, and stepped into the delicious coolness of the crooked path under great shadowy trees, all her gay spirit came back to her. In the long grass pink campion and blue speedwells were growing. The blue-bells had gone, but beside every stream the creamy feathery meadowsweet was coming out. Pam ran along the path with Binky beside her, stopping now and then to pick flowers and to pat her beloved companion.

"Isn't it lovely," she said, "to be in the country, Binky, where all the flowers are free? Have you

forgot the stiff old parks? I 'spect you have, poor Binky, because, you see, you are a dog, and don't have to learn lessons, so what would be the use of a memory for you? But you wouldn't forget me if I went away and left you, would you? It must take one kind of memory to learn lessons with, and another to love people. It's terrible puzzling—but then lots of things are. I think I'll ask the old mistress about it. She's answered lots of questions—she's very good at it."

Binky barked, as much as to say that he had as good a memory as anyone need wish to have, if only stupid human beings could understand his language, and Pam kissed his nose, and told him he need not be afraid, for she would never, never leave him behind—no, not if she went to live in a gold and silver palace with diamond doors.

"It looks as if this wood ought to come out near a palace like that, for it's quite a fairy wood," said the little girl to herself. "I think this stream must be the one that the barge sailed away on, though it wouldn't hold a very big one. All these flowers ought to come alive, and whisper about it to me, while that big old oak—he should stoop down and tell me who's got to be forgiven for love's dear sake. I'm afraid after all he isn't a fairy oak, but only a plain growing one. Hulloa! Why, Binky, we've come out in quite a different part. After all, he must be a fairy oak, and he is showing us the way. That's quite a different side of the house from the part where the old mistress sits and sews. And there seems nobody in this part. Binky, it must be enchanted. We won't tell anybody the secret, but we'll just have a look."

Very softly, on tiptoe, and holding Binky's leader

fast, Pam went across the soft old grass that had been growing there for a hundred years. Her little footfall made no noise, but she crept along the terrace with a beating heart, for she felt herself to be in the thick of an adventure. The old house appeared to have turned a corner just here, where a big silent wing jutted out behind it. The great low windows had no curtains here, and the rooms inside were empty. Pam peeped in over the sills, but there was nothing to see, except here and there a picture, which seemed to have been left behind and forgotten, hanging on the wall.

A sort of sadness came over little Pam as she peered into big bare rooms, though she whispered to Binky that they would be splendid for hide-and-seek. She did not know that this part of Nestlecombe Hall had always belonged to its children, and that to some people their voices rang there yet.

Suddenly, as she stepped back, Pam caught sight of something in an upper window which instantly held her eyes fast. It hung there, low and plainly visible, for there were no curtains to hide it. And it was a dainty little birdcage made of gilt wire, such as Pam would have loved to hang in the window of Jessamine Cottage, with a canary inside that she could take care of.

"Dicky, Dicky," she called softly, but there was no answer. It was a very long time since a yellow canary had hopped about that cage, and as she craned her neck and made herself as big as possible, Pamela could see that it was empty.

How funny, she thought, to have an empty birdcage swinging in the sunny window, and such a pretty one, too, when so many canaries only had wooden cages for their homes. Then curiosity stirred in Pam.

The Gilt Birdcage

Why did the old mistress keep an empty birdcage in one of her windows instead of giving it to, say, Mr. Dick Raven, who kept a canary in his kitchen?

There was a little door under the window where the birdcage hung, half-hidden in ivy which was almost growing across it. The handle was rusty and green with age, and the lock was coming to pieces. Surely a strong push would open that little door.

Pam gave it a push which she thought a very strong one, but she only succeeded in shaking it, while Binky set up a tremendous bark.

"'Sh, Binky, I thought I could trust you," said Pam severely. And she tried another push, but all in vain. A slim little girl seven years old could not move that old door, which had been shut for long years. But there was a keyhole. Pamela tied Binky up to an ivy branch and sternly bade him lie down. Then, brushing away the tangled leaves, she put one bright eye to the little round hole and peered into the silent darkness. At first she could see nothing, then suddenly out of the darkness a tall figure seemed to step, close to the door, yet at the bottom of a flight of steps. Pam breathed hard, but did not cry out, and then she saw what it was—just a man in armour, like the one who stood in the great hall near Mrs. Devale's library door.

"Fancy me being afraid of that," said Pam aloud, though her cheeks were red, and she was quite out of breath. "I should be silly, but I can't find out nothing. Tell you what, Binky, we'll just go round and ask old mistress."

Five minutes later Pamela had reached the window of the library, and was looking in. There sat the two ladies as always, silently working and waiting for tea-

time. Pam sighed. It was such a golden afternoon in the woods. Was Miss Elizabeth obliged to get to the end of that long white strip before tea?

The old lady heard Pam's little sigh and looked up. Was it fancy that made her daughter think that a light crept into her white thin face? For two weeks that quick step and gay laugh had not been heard on the terrace. The old lady had never mentioned her name, but Miss Elizabeth had been confident that she had missed Pam.

"Well!" said the little girl—"Well! I've not seen you for ages and ages."

"No," replied the old mistress sternly. "But children soon forget. Doubtless you have been otherwise amused."

"I've been in bed," said Pamela indignantly, "with a most awful cold and a cough. I've had to have black currant tea, but it's good, and was made off our bushes. I *did* think perhaps you would come and see how I was; but you didn't. I thought we was friends."

Pam spoke wistfully, and the old lady said nothing, when suddenly Binky, thinking himself slighted, gave a short bark.

"Who's brought a dog here?" inquired Mrs. Devale. "I don't allow dogs."

"I—well, I suppose he is a dog," said Pam. "But it's Binky Tempest, he's one of the family, and he's been shut up in his kennel all the week. I simply had to bring him—and I wanted you to know each other, too. Sit up, Binky, and give the lady your hand."

Binky did so, and to Miss Elizabeth's surprise, her mother put out a thin finger or two and touched the little terrier's paw.

"There, now you are friends," said Binky's mistress.

"I can always tell when Binky likes anybody, and he likes you. He can't bear that boy who goes to the same school as Tony—Billy Barstow, I mean. Binky tries to get at his legs, but since he fought Tony he hasn't been to the cottage. Did you hear about it?"

"No," said the old lady. "No, indeed. What have I to do with such things, child?"

"I thought p'r'aps it was in the newspaper," said Pam. "And Hannah said you read the papers till you was blinded. Well, Tony, he came home all mud and with his jacket torn—and it was his newest one, too, that he had to go to school with. It took hours and hours to mend. But Elinor forgave him because he told her the truth, and because he fought for the family."

Old Mrs. Devale drew herself up ever so slightly, and her beetle brows came together. She was a tall and terrible old figure, but Pam looked up at her fearlessly, and asked a question.

"Would you have forgave him—for love's dear sake?" she inquired.

"I would have forgiven him for honour's sake," said the old woman in a clear voice. "For honour's sake, and the sake of his name. I knew a boy called Antony once—long, long ago—and he was always honourable."

"Yes, and so is Tony; and that man, you know—the good son who the old witch man wouldn't forgive when he loved the people—his name was Antony—did you mean that one?"

"No," said the old mistress shortly. "That's nothing but a tale, child."

"But tales are the loveliest things in the world. Elinor's writing one," said Pam with pride

"Elinor is writing one?" repeated Mrs. Devale.

"Yes—and it's going to the newspaper, and if she gets two guineas, she's going to buy Tony another suit. You see, he smashed a shop window, so it's no wonder he was torn."

The old mistress paused as she threaded her needle.

"Did he win the fight?" she asked.

"Yes. He sent Billy Barstow flying into a puddle and he came home with his head all bleeding. But he's kept straight and told the truth, and we all stood by him. Hannah says we must always stand by one another, and then life can do its worst. But you would always stand by your own family, whatever they did, wouldn't you?"

The old lady looked sharply at the little girl, but Pam's innocent eyes met hers.

"You would, wouldn't you?" she said again.

"Wait until Antony sows his wild oats," remarked the old mistress. "He's only a boy now."

"Well, he says he wants to be a farmer since we came here," answered Pam. "But what are wild oats? Are those getting so ripe and yellow in the fields just tame ones? Antony's going to sow that kind. He told me so this morning. But whatever he sows—Elinor and me—we shall help him. We've promised—and the Tempests always keep their word."

Mrs. Devale coughed as if to close the subject, and Bennett appeared with tea, strawberry jam, and a smile. He had grown accustomed to seeing Pam looking over the window-sill, and included her as a matter of course.

"Oh," cried Pam, "couldn't we have tea out here? That's real story-book jam, it's so red; and haven't you noticed how like fairy tales things taste when you eat them out of doors? We had breakfast in

the garden this morning. There was only porridge, but it tasted of bees and roses and madonna lilies."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Devale, but she signed to the butler to bring out a little carved table, and set chairs on the terrace.

"Now we'll be jolly. Let me help you to step over," and the little girl guided the old lady's black silk skirts, and handed her her ebony stick as though she had done it every day of her life.

"Here's a chair for you, old mistress," she said, and then she stopped.

"Why," she said, "why—this is our chair. It's the one we sold—our old Jacobean chair that mummy loved, but said she had to part with. There's the very iron band that the man put on when she was a little girl, and b'sieged it—but that is 'most a hundred years ago."

Even Bennett looked hard at his mistress as he put down the silver teapot. And as she raised her eyes, they met her daughter's lovely dark ones, asking mutely for a message from the past. In that look a secret was told all unknown to little Pam, who did not see that in that long moment her old friend's face grew more like faded parchment than ever.

"You see, I was right," said Pam, munching toast and offering a precious bite to Binky, who was behaving wonderfully well. "This bite of toast—why, it's just like birds singing in trees—thrushes and blackbirds and tom-tits—and why, and yes—canaries. And that reminds me—please, please, old mistress, will you tell me why you keep a beautiful gold birdcage hanging up in an empty window, and with no canary in it? Mr. Raven has a canary in his kitchen. He says it keeps him from feeling lonesome when he's finished milking.

But it only has a wooden cage. Don't you think you would like to give him your empty gold one?"

"You are strangely fond of giving away other people's property," said Mrs. Devale.

"Well, you see, it would be so useful—and p'r'aps if it had a gold cage, Mr. Raven would lend his canary to me for a bit. I should so love to have one—but they are 'spensive. Will you tell me, please, why you keep yours empty?"

"If perseverance in making inquiries means anything, you should make your fortune some day, my dear," returned the old mistress, and something in her voice told the little girl that she had asked one question too many. You never knew with grown-up people, mused Pamela, for a birdcage did not seem a private sort of thing. Yet it was plain that the old mistress was not very pleased. Pam felt a tiny little fear creep up her back.

She had finished her tea, so she left her seat and went to lean against the old lady's chair—that same chair which had once been so familiar a thing in the Bloomsbury flat. She rubbed her hand up and down its smooth arm.

"It makes me feel as if mummy had come back," she said, "to stand against this chair. Sometimes I want my mummy very badly."

Miss Elizabeth had gone away, and the old lady and the child were alone. Pamela felt a thin trembling hand stroke her chestnut curls for a moment, but it did not surprise her. She had been used to tender touches all her life, and was only surprised when they were absent.

"What would you do—if your mummy did not want you any more?" asked Mrs. Devale—"if she never let you come home to her again?"

The old mistress was leaning forward in the high-backed chair, one thin hand clasping her stick. She was looking into Pam's eyes with an intent gaze, and had forgotten that she spoke to a child.

But Pam was not afraid. Indeed, she only laughed and put her hand inside the old lady's black silk sleeve.

"You are funning at me," she said, "and making up stories—but not fairy ones. Mummies don't do things like that—not real mummies. They love you too much, you know—even if you are naughty. Elinor and Hannah gets tired of telling me things sometimes—but not mummy. She never did, and I wish—oh, I wish she would come home."

A long, old, tired sigh came from the lips of the old mistress, and Pam looked up in surprise. Then she heard a voice say scarcely above a whisper, "I wish she would come home too."

Pam clapped her hands. "There's a clock striking, and Hannah will be looking for me," she said. "But I'll tell you what. I'll pray every night by the window, where the jessamine comes in, that God will hurry and make daddy better. Will you pray it too?"

"Yes, child," said the old lady. "Run away home now and go to bed with the birds—but I won't forget. I'll do it."

"It's a secret between us," whispered Pam. "And I love a secret. Good-bye. May I kiss you?"

For two long minutes a pair of round soft arms were round the old lady's neck, and two red lips were pressed against her parchment cheek. Then Pam jumped down, and followed by Binky, who was glad enough to go, ran home to Jessamine Cottage.

CHAPTER IX

THE FAMILY SHIP TURNS HOME

By all means use sometimes to be alone.
Salute thyself: see what thy soul doth wear.
Dare to look in thy chest, for 'tis thine own,
And tumble up and down what thou find'st there.
—*George Herbert.*

"HANNAH! What do you think? Have you heard the news? I say, Hannah, she's got it. Elinor's got it."

"Got what?" asked Hannah in consternation, pausing broom in hand. "Nothing catching, I hope."

"Catching! No such luck, or I'd catch it. She's got the prize in the *Wiltshire Weekly*. She's earned two guineas for a story. Isn't it grand?"

"Grand!" ejaculated Hannah. "It's not suitable. We don't want all the butchers' boys in the countryside a-reading Miss Elinor's tales."

"But we do," cried Antony. "That's fame, Hannah—when even butchers' boys read your tales. 'See the conquering hero comes,'" he concluded, with a flourish of the newspaper, as Elinor appeared downstairs.

And when Hannah looked at the girl's flushed face and saw the first light of a little bit of local success in her eyes, she said no more, but only went off muttering to the kitchen:

"It's Miss Elinor's wild oats," she said to the shining pans. "And if they are like most I've seen sowed at Nestlecombe, for sure they'll only come up bachelor's buttons, as gives the gardins a dash o' red for a week or two. Trust Miss Elinor to tire o' this pen-and-ink business. She's over pretty for a newspaper writer. There, yes, I thought so."

For Elinor had appeared in the kitchen doorway, and stood silent for a moment watching Hannah's busy fingers as she made the bread.

"I'm—er—going to Salisbury this morning," she said. "I promised to take Pam to see Canon Elkin, so we are going to have a treat to celebrate my success."

"Right, Miss Elinor," agreed Hannah promptly, tossing the dough and nodding her head to herself when Elinor had gone. "I'd no need to worry. The old Canon indeed. It's Mr. Richard as she wants to hear say has read this here tale of hers, and never see such a one in print before. It fair brings the old times back again, before old mistress hardened her heart like Pharaoh, to see these young things. Well! I wouldn't change places with Mrs. Devale o' Nestlecombe Hall—no, not for a year's good dinners for my family. Poor body—old and lonely and forsaken, and still holding fast to that will of hers. She's for all the world like Thomas. She made one big mistake, and she's got to abide by it ever since. We only read as Thomas doubted once, but it's stuck to him ever since, poor man. More than likely if old mistress had her time to go over again, she'd do different. Why, wouldn't most of us? I wonder now what Miss Pam was whispering in her

prayers last night. A little child 'll lead her grannie into the light afore long, or my name ain't Hannah Snell—and always will be."

Hannah said the last words fiercely, for she could see through her kitchen window Dick Raven drawing up his milk-cart at the door, and Pam climbing into it with a radiant face. It jangled away, the music of the cans rattling merrily, to Pamela's delight, but Hannah took no notice.

Another chariot left Nestlecombe that morning for the old cathedral city, but not until the merry milk-cart was half-way there. The ark-like brougham of the Devales came swinging down the avenue under the yews behind its fat horses, which seldom needed to bestir themselves. Within, and almost hidden, sat Miss Elizabeth, her face pale, and her figure shrinking.

She had passed a sleepless night in her great four-post bed. Looking out between the dim curtains in the moonlight, she had lain with her eyes on the trees and the lake in the park. It was dark and silent, for no ripple of wind, no moonbeam disturbed it. No silver barge sailed there, and as the old legend echoed in Miss Elizabeth's heart, she told herself that she knew who it was that must be forgiven for love's dear sake. All the old days of laughter and love and faith in each other, and in God, passed before her as she lay sleepless until dawn. She saw again that charming brave sister who had spurned what was low and luxurious, and gone out into a hard world with a courage born of love and right. She saw the long years of waiting that had passed since, which she had spent in the grand old rooms that had been a veritable prison to her soul.

The Family Ship Turns Home

All sorts of calls had come to Elizabeth Devale as she sat there with her patient needle in her hand. She had longed to go out into a wider world and do something for her kind as well as educate herself. But she had been shut up to a very narrow atmosphere, yet had made it a gate of life. In all Nestlecombe, hearts that were sad turned to her, and joy that looked for sympathy came likewise.

It had only been very seldom that Miss Elizabeth had dared to go against that iron will of her tall, stern mother, who still saw in her a child to be guided and controlled, and kept from following her sister. But when she rose on this August morning, Miss Elizabeth calmly ordered the carriage for ten o'clock in her mother's hearing, and the old lady said nothing, except that she did not feel equal to driving.

"No, mother," returned Miss Elizabeth. "I am merely going to Salisbury on business. I want the carriage for myself."

Mrs. Devale paused as she served the bacon, but said nothing, and her daughter marvelled both at her own temerity and the way it was received.

Elizabeth had made up her mind in the night and formed a plan of campaign. From the first she told herself she had suspected it, even on that spring day when she saw Elinor in the lane, and when little Pam first came to the window. These were her sister's children, her own kin, to whom her heart went out in a great and natural longing. Their clothes were shabby, and it was evident from little Pam's innocent talk that only the genius of Hannah Snell could make ends even approach the meeting-place, at Jessamine Cottage.

"Hannah says it's the green stuff in the garden that ties the knot," Pam had told them.

And Nell?—the brave and beautiful sister—it was evident that life was hard for her still, though even yet good and full of blessing. Far away among the mountains, how was it faring with her, Elizabeth wondered. Her store of gold would be ebbing fast by now. Did she see health and strength coming back to the face she loved so much? Ah, yes, with all her troubles and her empty purse, Nell was a rich woman. The lute strings of her life were strung to a high pitch, but there were other lutes to answer to its music. Miss Elizabeth knew nothing of the joy of that.

Elizabeth had plenty of money of her own. A distant relative, pitying her confined life, had left her a fortune which was little good to her, and which she found difficult to spend. Only the poor and sick knew what she did with it, and those few people who had seen the books on her shelves.

But this morning she had made up her mind that she would make life easier at Jessamine Cottage if it were in any wise possible to do it.

After the silence and estrangement of many years, which her mother's action had made inevitable, she meant to seek out the old Canon and ask his advice. Surely Richard Elkin, fully-fledged lawyer that he now was, could make out and administer a deed of gift without anyone knowing whom it came from?

But what if she should be mistaken? Tempest was not so uncommon a name. But no chance could have given Elinor her sister's eyes and hair. It was love and longing for the past, surely, that

had chosen such names as Elinor and Antony, and old-fashioned Pamela—the name of the old mistress herself.

The ancient carriage swayed and lumbered into Salisbury, past the low-browed shops whose parlours are still shrines of oaken panelling. Beyond the beautiful Poultry Cross, and round the corner, Miss Elizabeth told the coachman to stop and put up his horses. She would walk under the Close Gate, and do the rest of her business on foot.

Yet even now she had not courage to go straight to the little old house in the corner. She dreaded to hear anything that should destroy her dream, or prove her to be wrong.

So she turned round and walked back into the town, aimlessly looking in the book shops, and frowning perhaps at the modern plate glass window here and there. She was the victim of a sudden indecision that swayed her to and fro, and left her mind in a kind of agony.

Feeling like this, Miss Elizabeth brought up suddenly before the window of a shop that she never remembered to have seen before. It was new and staring, and the plate glass window was filled with bright articles of silver and gold, garishly new and terribly modern. It was like a breath of a coarser century to Miss Elizabeth, which had stirred up the ancient atmosphere of the cathedral city and spoiled it. She was glad this vulgar little shop was a long way from the silence of the lawns within the Close.

Miss Elizabeth was turning away, when suddenly something in the centre of the shop window arrested her attention. It was strangely different from the rest of the things displayed there, and looked out of place indeed among ornate sugar bowls, roughly-chased fish

carvers, and decorated clocks. It reminded Miss Elizabeth of a gentlewoman of the ancient *régime* elbowed by a modern crowd—and as she looked closer she knew that she saw something which had once been as familiar to her as her own name.

The delicate miniature set in brilliants, with chased gold of an old faintly yellow tint, and hanging on a slender chain, had once come from Nestlecombe Hall. It was the youthful face of a great-grandmother of her own that looked out at her from the powder and patches within the brilliants. How had it come into this jeweller's shop? The last time Elizabeth Devale had seen it, it lay warm and sparkling on her sister's neck one unforgettable day when she came across the park, wetting her feet in the dew of dusk, having parted from her lover. The hopes and fears of other generations than her own lurked in that miniature too. Who could expose it to the common gaze in a shop window?

Miss Elizabeth felt first indignant and then sad. She thought she knew the explanation. This was the window that Tony had broken. And in this way his sister had paid his debt with a costly price that was far beyond it.

With a firm tread she went into the shop, and demanded to see the miniature. The voice in which she asked for it made a sensation, and the jeweller did not stay to bandy words or compliments with her. He looked indeed decidedly uneasy as she turned it over in her hand, and then looked straight at him.

"I happen to know where this came from," she said. "It is a family ornament. I should like to know how it came into your hands."

"I—er—assure you, madam, I took it to oblige a lady who sold it to me. I gave her a high price for it, and I am only asking five pounds for it now. You may see for yourself, if you understand such things, that it is worth more."

"If it is worth more, why do you sell it for that?" inquired Miss Devale. "You should find no difficulty in disposing of it."

"Well—er—this is not London," said the jeweller.

"No, and therefore such a thing as this is the more easily noticed. I will take it, and I will wait until you have cleaned it a little."

The jeweller and his assistant both rushed round the counter to set a chair for Miss Elizabeth Devale. She waved them back and took one for herself, making no answer to the jeweller's pleasantries while he did what she told him, and found a case for the miniature. She sat and thought, and her resolve took a different turn. She decided that she would not go to Canon Elkin and try to help the inmates of Jessamine Cottage through a lawyer. She would go, with the old miniature in her hand, back to her mother sitting sewing in the library window of Nestlecombe Hall. She would show her this old treasure, she would tell her the story, and ask her to take back her daughter and her grandchildren to her heart and her hearth. That is, if they would come!—but surely she need not fear that? Little Pam, at least, would not refuse the olive branch "for love's dear sake."

As Miss Elizabeth sat with her eyes on the street beyond the window, she was suddenly arrested. Three people met outside, and two of them evidently met with a gladness that all at once wrapped a new

glory in the August day. Elinor's hand was held by Richard Elkin for a second, while little Pam looked on. Then he spoke, and the woman in the shop could hear what he said.

"I say, I've read your story. Best I've read in a month of Sundays, and I congratulate you. Good idea, too, making a story out of the loss of that picture of yours, and uncle and I have been saying since we read it that we ought to have helped you to find it. But we both forgot all that since—since we knew you. I'm a lawyer, you know. Won't you let me be useful now? In fact, I mean to find that picture for you, whether you let me or not. I've made a few inquiries already, to tell you the truth, and I'm going up to town and shall look round and keep my eyes open. It may be easier to find it now than it was when it was stolen, and the thieves expected a row."

It was not all gratitude nor yet embarrassment at the success of her story that made Elinor confused. She would never forget that just for a time Hannah's words had made her doubt Richard—if they had ever really done so.

"Oh, has Canon Elkin really read my story?" she asked.

"I should just think he has. Why, the old boy never looked at the *Times* this morning until he had read it every word. I have been teasing him, I can tell you. He said it was sweet and wholesome, and full of ingenuity that might become charm. And he thought it was like the writer," added Richard, in a lower tone that Miss Devale could not hear.

The three passed out of her sight, followed by Binky, who had also gone to Salisbury that morning,

and it seemed to Miss Elizabeth that a glow of life and happiness went with them out of the old street. She took her little packet from the jeweller and paid her five pounds without any words, and presently she went quickly in search of her carriage at the hotel.

All the way back to Nestlecombe, holding the miniature fast in her hands, Miss Elizabeth saw castles in the air by the wayside and within the woods. And they were not bubbles that time should prick. They were built upon old foundations laid long ago, that love had lately revealed and would build new walls thereon.

It was quite late when she came again into the great library at Nestlecombe Hall, but her mother did not seem to have noticed her absence. She was sitting as usual by the window, but in the Jacobean chair, and she was not busy with her needlework. Her gold spectacles were planted firmly on her high-bred Roman nose, and she held the sheet of a newspaper up to the light. The old mistress was deep in the *Wiltshire Weekly*, and she was reading her granddaughter Elinor's tale.

Miss Elizabeth almost gasped. A crisis was surely drawing near without any help from her. She sat down in the shadow, and drew a book towards her, while presently the paper dropped from her mother's hands, which did not seek at once for their needlework.

There was a silence. Miss Elizabeth ventured to ask a question.

"Is that an interesting number of the *Weekly?*" she inquired.

"Fairly—I have been studying the advertisements. What a needless and useless number! No wonder so many tradesmen cannot make a living. It is a long

time since I was at Salisbury, and should doubtless find it changed. Does it appear so to you?"

"Not very much—it is a place hard to spoil. There are brick walls where there used to be apple-blossom, but that is not confined to cities."

Mrs. Devale looked sharply at her daughter, as if against her will she read the meaning of her words. Then she took up her spectacles and polished the already shining surface with hands that surely trembled.

"Was your business satisfactory?" she asked.

"Quite, thank you, mother," was the answer.

Again there was a pause, this time broken by the old mistress, who looked across at her daughter with as near an approach to timidity as she could ever feel.

"You used to sing and play once, child," she said. "Why has the piano so long been silent? You need not grow old before your time, Elizabeth."

"I think I have been old—for years," said Elizabeth gently. "But this year—I am feeling young again. Would you like me to sing?"

"Yes, my dear, I should."

Elizabeth rose from her seat in the shadow and crossed the room to a distant corner where a grand piano stood unnoticed in the spaciousness of the room. She threw back the lid, and with halting fingers touched the keys. It was long since they had been tuned, and some of them were dumb. It had been a fine instrument once, but like other fine things, the easier damaged by neglect.

Yet Elizabeth was a born musician, and sweet hesitating chords stole out from under her fingers. Then a voice, rich and rare, which had been long silent like the keys, rose and fell and filled the room in the old poet's haunting, magical song.

The Family Ship Turns Home

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage,
Minds innocent and quiet, take
That for a hermitage.
If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone who soar above
Enjoy such liberty."

Ah, Lovelace! Centuries ago you knew the human heart which changes not.

And within the stern figure by the window was a heart, though it had long been wrapped in the cold shroud of a dogged will. Mrs. Devale heard the cry of longing in her daughter's voice, which had been so long repressed in deference to her desire. Again and again the old true words sounded through the room. Bennett heard them in his pantry, and stood transfixed. They reached the housekeeper's room, and she clasped her old hands on her stiff black silk knee and wondered what it meant. The dairymaid heard the tones as she came up with fresh butter before she went down to the village. Before dusk all Nestlecombe knew that Miss Elizabeth was singing in the shadows of the library an old song that her sister used to sing when they both were young.

When at last the song died away, Elizabeth turned round on the music-stool and looked at her mother. She was just in time to see the old mistress raise her fine white handkerchief to her eyes. She had never seen such a thing before, and with a trembling voice she spoke.

"Mother," she said.

"Yes, Elizabeth," was the answer.

Elizabeth rose and went towards the window.

"I want to tell you something," she said.

CHAPTER X

MISS ELIZABETH SPEAKS OUT

I gave to Hope a watch of mine, but he
An anchor gave to me,
Then an old prayer book I did present,
And he an optic sent.
With that I gave a phial full of tears,
But he a few green ears.
—*George Herbert.*

MRS. DEVALE adjusted her glasses and looked at her daughter with the same look that had frozen her courage at fifteen.

"Well," she said. "Well, Elizabeth! Do not waste time."

Elizabeth took a little case from her pocket and slowly opened it. The room was growing dusk now, for the August day was closing in and the moon had not yet risen. The two women could not see each other clearly, but in the twilight something sparkled as Elizabeth opened the case.

There on its velvet lining shone the precious old miniature, its brilliants flashing, the delicate face of the painted lady smiling up into the stern one that looked down upon it. Yes—the old mistress had seen that miniature before, when, nearly fifty years ago, she had come as a bride to the Hall, and the gallant gentleman who brought her there had laid all his family jewels at her feet with a great pride in their possession.

He had loved this old thing, and had told her a sad story about it—a story that came to stay the smile and dim the brightness of the sweet painted face long before she was born. The lady in the miniature was one of those who had begged for forgiveness for love's dear sake—and it had been denied. She had stolen away from Nestlecombe to nurse her suffering knight at the wars, and she had never been allowed to come back.

Miss Elizabeth's father had delighted in the story, and all his sympathy had been with the brave grandmother who had followed her heart.

But for some reason in her own nature his wife did not share his enthusiasm, and the miniature had never been a favourite of hers. She had refused to wear it as one of the family jewels, and on no festive occasion had it ever sparkled among her velvet or lace. So the Squire had put it carefully away and saved it up for his eldest daughter, in whose brave and gallant spirit he often saw a likeness to the great-grandmother who was one of his own heroines.

Elizabeth knew nothing of this, but it all crowded into her mother's memory as she looked down at the miniature she had not seen for more than twenty years. Scene after scene came back to her mind in which the old ornament had played a part and in which she had not listened to her own heart, but only to the pride that was so quick to prompt her.

Deeper grew the evening shadows in the library, while Elizabeth waited for her mother to speak. Her heart was all in the future now, and she longed to put away the past and build something new on its ruins.

But to the old lady, ghosts of old things hovered about the dim chairs and seemed to breathe old sighs

from the shadows. There surely, leaning against the carved chimney-piece as he so often did at dusk, was the figure of that true man who had gone so long before her out of the shadows into the light. The dead, faded life was vivid again as the brilliants about the miniature for a moment. Then, with a quick sound that was only half a sigh, the old mistress closed the case. She was sorry every Sunday morning for "the things she had done which she ought not to have done, and for those things which she had left undone that she ought to have done, and she acknowledged that there was no health in her." But her mistakes Mrs. Devale had never regretted, and she was not yet prepared to do so.

She handed the miniature back to her daughter with her most unapproachable air.

"Where did you get this?" she inquired.

"I bought it for five pounds in Salisbury this morning. Don't you recognise it, mother? I saw it last, twenty years ago—on Nell's neck."

The words were spoken now, and Elizabeth waited breathlessly for an answer.

Her mother took up her needlework again, and put in a few firm stitches before she spoke.

"It has nothing to do with us," she said at length. "Doubtless it is one of the Nestlecombe heirlooms, or a very good copy, but it was never a thing that I cared for. If you had a desire to have it back, all well and good. It has possibly passed through many hands."

"But, mother"—Elizabeth's voice had become a cry. She knew not what to do to stir this old closed heart, those pulses that had surely forgotten how to beat.

"But, mother—don't you know what it means?

Don't you know—have you not guessed who the children are at Jessamine Cottage? Oh, I know you have—I've seen it in your face when little Pamela was talking to you. Those are Nell's children—your own grandchildren—and oh, Elinor is so like her mother, and—and—so like father."

The needle in the old lady's hand gave a sudden dart, and a spot of crimson stained her white finger and her work. After all, there was blood in her veins, human blood—if it could be reached.

"You have a vivid imagination, Elizabeth," was all she said.

Then Miss Elizabeth did what she had not done in all her life, for in her far-off childhood she had never clung to her mother's stiff silk skirts, never clasped her knees with happy baby hands. But now she threw herself down beside the Jacobean chair and made the old lady put aside her needlework. She clasped the strong worn hands that were so cold with age, she even shook her mother a little to make her listen.

"Mother, they are down in the village, and I am sure things are going hard for them. I am sure it was to pay a debt that they parted with the miniature. Their father is far away, and they are so young. May I not bring them here? Won't you take them all back again—for love's dear sake?"

Miss Elizabeth paused, unable to say more, her voice shaken and her heart beating loudly.

The old mistress looked down at her exactly as she had always looked at any child who crossed her will.

"Get up, child," she said. "You are crushing my work. You have a strangely undisciplined nature, Elizabeth. You go off after wandering delusions like

a girl of sixteen. Calm yourself, and let me hear no more of this tale. The people at Jessamine Cottage have nothing to do with us. If my eldest daughter has possibly done such a thing as send her children down here in order to work upon my feelings, she is greatly mistaken. She chose her own lot and must abide by it."

"Mother, mother," wailed Elizabeth. "She sent them because the cottage was hers, and because it was empty, and no doubt she did not know what else to do. Her husband was ill, and she has taken him abroad. Wouldn't you have done the same?"

A spasm crossed the white face of the old mistress. Did her heart go back to that long journey which she had once taken in search of health with the man whom she had loved more than life? Wealth and opportunity had been his, but they had wooed health in vain.

"Leave me, Elizabeth," she said, with a gesture of dismissal. Her lips were still set, but some old, long-dead spark was lighted again in her eyes.

Miss Elizabeth went slowly from the library, but she did not go upstairs to her own room. She was possessed with a sudden desire to go down to the village, to see with her own eyes whether her sister's children were indeed in want of the daily things of life.

"Hannah and Dick Raven between them would not let them starve," she said aloud, with a great shame. She had done a bold thing to-night, and she must wait. Elizabeth was used to waiting for herself. It was harder to wait for other people.

She gathered up her long thin dress, which was grey like the twilight, and crossed the hall to a baize

door. Through this she entered a narrow passage where her footstep echoed as if nobody ever trod there, for it was empty and dark. Then she came to that same little door which Pamela had tried to push open, and turned the key in its rusty lock. The branch of ivy was dislodged, and the door creaked, but she pushed it open firmly, and so found herself in the narrow path through the woods where Pam had looked for fairy things.

The August day was nearly done now, and in the east a silver moon was just creeping up above the tree-tops. It hid behind the drifting clouds or shimmered over the barley fields that she could hear rustling in the quiet night.

She came to the green door in the park wall and opened it, and stepped out into the high road. It was after nine o'clock, and few people were abroad. Miss Elizabeth met nobody as she walked in the shadow of the trees and very soon reached the village. She passed the church, and the mossy old graves behind the yew-trees, one of which was her father's. She wondered whether he looked down from the spirit-land and knew what was happening to-night.

A few minutes more brought her to Jessamine Cottage. She opened the little gate without a sound, and went up the flagged path. She did not know what she was going to do, for it was a sudden impulse that had brought her. It was quite dark now, for the moon had gone behind the clouds, and she could smell the milk-white phloxes, the lavender bush, and the gay carnations that were so sweet in the cottage garden. Surely the herbaceous border below the terrace of the Hall was not half so sweet.

The little square window to the left of the door was illumined with lamplight, and its short white curtains were not drawn closely across, for people were not careful to shut out the night at Nestlecombe. Elizabeth went across the grass, and close to the window. It was slightly open, and the little white curtain fluttered to and fro. She forgot she was eavesdropping, as she peered in at the corner, in her interest in that homely little interior. Pam and Tony were in bed, and Elinor had asked Hannah to bring her work into the cosy parlour. They sat one on each side of the small square table, where a shaded lamp stood, busy with their needles, Hannah so intent on a short full skirt she was fashioning that no noise in the garden would have disturbed her.

Miss Elizabeth noticed the rose-washed walls, the tall old clock, the green bowl full of sweet peas, and the pretty table-cover. There were only one or two pictures on the wall, but above the chimney-piece hung a photograph that looked down like a guardian angel on the room. It was the sweet brave face of her sister.

"Hannah," said Elinor suddenly, "I've a sort of feeling that our ship has turned home. Mother spoke so hopefully in her last letter, I expect to hear better news still to-morrow."

"Well, there's nothing like hope, love," returned Hannah. "It makes a rich sauce for a poor meal. Personally, I've never had much hope about your pa. I respect the master above most, but how any self-respectin' man could expect to keep a family out of an inkpot—well, it couldn't be done, my dear. Of course it couldn't."

Elinor laughed. It was not often that Hannah had the blues, but when she did, she had them thoroughly.

The girl herself was full of hope to-night, and something more beautiful and wonderful still. She looked down at the toe of her shabby slipper, and touched the neck of her much-washed blouse. But her eyes were shining and downcast, and the lamplight made a halo of her hair. From time immemorial princesses have looked their best in rags.

"I'm going to begin a new story to-morrow," she said. "I don't mean the grass to grow under my feet now."

Hannah grunted. "Ay, it's all grass," she said, "and precious few o' daisies. And all to pay for Master Tony's smashes."

"Not at all—and daisies are bad for grass," said Elinor. "I've paid for that, Hannah, long ago, and you mustn't ask how. Boys always have a few rows before they settle down, and we sent Tony to a public school to learn to give and take and play the game."

"Givin' and takin's all very well, if it isn't all givin' on one side and all takin' on the other, but that's what it mostly is in this world. I know what I would like to give—a bit o' my mind up at the 'All. I'd take what was sent me in return."

"Why, Hannah—it is you who are so sorry for that lonely old woman."

"Even worms 'll turn," said Hannah. "I've been wriggling for a good bit, and now I've turned. Tell you what it is, Miss Elinor, I can't abide the idea of you as a public character. It fair raises my soul. There, child, there, I'll say no more. Wouldn't you like a cup of cocoa before you go to bed? You'd precious little supper."

"No—o, I think not. Keep the cocoa for Pam. She has flagged in the hot weather and I haven't, and the tin must last until the end of the month."

"It shall," said Hannah grimly. "There's lots of ways of eking out, and few as passes me."

Miss Elizabeth did not stay to hear more. She went back between the sweet peas and the lavender as quietly as she came, and opened the little gate.

She looked up towards the open window where Pamela was fast asleep. Jessamine Cottage was a humble little place behind its box borders, but it was what Nestlecombe Hall had never been for many long years—it was a home.

Back through the green gate and the wood went Miss Elizabeth. She walked swiftly between the black trees and the velvet dark of the undergrowth. She was not afraid, she was too full of her own thoughts and too familiar with the place for that. But as she went on in the faint moonlight, a sense of things she could not see came to her.

She forgot she had come out through the unused wing and the little door, and she went back across the park towards the terrace. The library was in darkness. Either Mrs. Devale was sitting there without a light, or she had gone away.

But she did not go up the broad steps to the terrace. She walked on absently past the front of her home and down to the margin of the shining lake under its sweeping trees. The moon came out from the passing clouds, and looked down at her through the willows. She almost fancied she saw a smile on its round silver face.

It was a night for fancies. Miss Elizabeth stood

on the edge of the lake that had taken so big a part in the history of her family, and peered into the darkness. She looked up at the ruined tower where that mysterious ancestor of hers had once lived and done such strange things. She thought she could almost see him there, in his long magician's robe and with his white beard reaching to his knee. Surely that was a light other than moonlight that stole across the little grated window. Something seemed to whisper the old rhyme, which had so often come true.

> "When Devale is forgiven for love's dear sake,
> The silver barge will float on the lake."

What was that coming towards her in the shallows, drifting slowly in and out of a blue moonbeam under the drooping willows? Did she see silken sails? Did she catch a fleeting glimpse of a silver prow and a gleaming vessel? For a moment her heart stood still, for she had always half-believed the beautiful old fairy legend. She glanced at the great dark house. Was the last of the wandering Devales forgiven there to-night for love's dear sake? She was afraid to hope, and she turned back to the lake.

Alas! it was not the barge. It was but a branch of grey and silver leaves that had been struck from a poplar that overhung the water.

Miss Elizabeth went slowly up the steps and in at the great hall door. She passed the men in armour who guarded the staircase, the old family treasures that stood for so much and meant so little, and grasping the rail she went upstairs to the great gallery above. She was strangely tired, and suddenly full of misgiving. Had she done more harm than good? Had she made

things worse instead of better for the children at Jessamine Cottage? She could not tell, but——

How came that red baize door to be open? It stood at the end of a long corridor that led from the central gallery. It had only been unlocked by the housekeeper for an annual cleaning since she could remember. It led to that nursery wing which was so silent now, and the door stood wide open.

Elizabeth stole down the corridor and through the door. A musty scent met her, a feeling of dust and desolation, and all about her echoed whispers of very different things. She went on without a sound across the wide landing, which had once been so famous a place for play, and towards a door which was also open. The moonlight streamed out and left her in shadow, while it filled the large square room with light.

She stepped to the door and looked into the old nursery where every generation of Devales had been rocked to sleep and played its earliest games. There in the moonlight hung the empty birdcage which was so great a mystery to Pam. And there also she saw what somehow did not surprise her. Before the wide, old-fashioned chintz couch, which had once figured in many a romance, knelt the old mistress of Nestlecombe Hall, her face buried in her hands, her tall spare figure shaking with sobs.

"God forgive me! God forgive me!"—her daughter could hear her cry in broken tones. "Forgive me, and give me back my children," prayed the grey-haired woman again and again.

"Thank God!" whispered Miss Elizabeth in her heart, and turning, went back as she had come. The old rhyme did indeed echo about the old walls that night. A Devale had been forgiven for love's dear sake.

CHAPTER XI

THE PICTURE AGAIN

When thou dost purpose aught (within thy power),
Be sure to do it, though it be but small;
Constancy knits the bones, and makes us stour
When wanton pleasures beckon us to thrall.
Who breaks his own bond, forfeiteth himself;
What nature made a ship, he makes a shelf.

—*George Herbert.*

THAT was an eventful day to everybody upon which Miss Elizabeth went to Salisbury and Elinor won a prize for her story. In the afternoon, Richard Elkin caught the London express with a more unwilling heart than he had done for a long time. Usually he had enjoyed his business jaunts to town, and been inclined to prolong them, but now there was a new charm to him in the country lanes. The chance of meeting Elinor in the old streets or further afield was worth all the bustle and stir of London.

If only he might get nearer to her! If only he might do something that would give him a sight of her without such gaps between! But he supposed he must wait until her mother came back before he went to the cottage. And he might not find favour in Mrs. Tempest's eyes.

But this morning there had been a charming hour

in the old house in the corner of the Close. The Canon had been delighted with Pam, and Richard wondered for the twentieth time why he had looked at her as he did, and why he spoke so much of old things and old times when the girls had gone. But Canon Elkin had kept their secret, though he wondered much what his nephew would say when he found it out.

It was late when Richard got to London, and he soon turned in. Next morning he dismissed his business as soon as he could, and after lunch he took the tube to Whitechapel. He had never been there before, and began to feel as if he had come to an alien land, before he finally reached his destination in Mile End Road.

Here he stood still, wondering what to do next, for he was not at all sure what he had come for. He had obtained the addresses of a few old picture shops known to the police, where rare treasures had sometimes been found, but he was rather at a loss to find his way to them.

All about him the busy tide of London's East End life rushed on along one of the widest streets in the world. Motor 'buses, tooting taxis, costers' carts, and rumbling waggons poured on for ever. Here a great picture palace reared its gaudy front, and clamoured for patrons. There the dark, silent buildings of a mighty hospital looked down in pity on the hurrying crowds that must stop some day, and perhaps come there for life or death.

Little children danced and scampered past Richard, and he felt his heart go out to them. Thin and ragged, and unchildlike in their sharp faces and artful ways, they looked up at Richard as he stood undecided

and spoke to him impudently. Perhaps it was their words which gave him the first impetus towards helping his kind, which afterwards become one of the greatest motives of his life.

Surely this place, where so much darkness and evil were hidden under bustle and brightness, belonged to a different plane from the ancient cathedral city. Richard felt glad that his home at least was in a spot where life and happiness were simpler—easier to find and better to keep.

He inquired his way from a red-faced loafer, who, seeing him hesitate, came up and begged the price of a pint. Then he turned into one of the tortuous ways of the East End, and was soon lost in the labyrinth of close and winding streets, where screams and squalor were the most commonplace things. Second-hand shops abounded, and he stopped and looked in them all, but they failed to produce the thing he was in search of. It was like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay.

At last he came up to a dirty, desolate-looking shop in a corner, whose contents had spread themselves half-way across the narrow street. There were beds that looked as if no mortal could sleep in them, broken clocks, cracked mirrors, cheap and ill-made things, that yet had meant, in coming there, the breaking up of homes and perhaps of hearts. Here and there among them was a beautiful thing, an ancient chest, a bureau made by a famous man, and Richard made up his mind to come down here again some day and look for treasures. Perhaps when he and Elinor Tempest—but it was no moment for castles in the air.

As he stood peering into the disordered shop with unusual interest, a woman came out of a court near by. She was a frowsy, disappointed-looking soul, and the sickly child in her arms was more like a grey-faced old man than a tiny baby. Already it seemed to feel the grim strain of life in London.

The woman stared at Richard with a look of amazement on her dull face, and it was long since such interest had been roused there. She was a middle-aged woman, and had once been a pretty girl. But she looked old enough to be the baby's grandmother.

After staring a moment she disappeared again up the terrible court, and presently came back, but not alone. Beside her shuffled a little under-sized man, with reddish eyes, and a face that had grown hopeless. She pointed towards Richard, and he too started when he saw him.

"It's the Canon's nephew, sure enough," he said. "He'll be arter that picture, Maggie."

"O' course he will, and yer ought to 'elp him. The Canon was a good friend to us once."

"And would be agin if we'd let him."

"I'd be only too glad ter let him—but it's too late to go back," said the woman helplessly. "There now, the young gentleman's going. Go arter him, Bill."

Bill started forward, and Richard felt a sudden touch at his elbow. He turned quickly, expecting to find a little hand in his pocket, but to his surprise he saw a low-looking man who might once have been a groom, but was now the hanger-on of East End gambling dens. There was something in his face that was familiar, and Richard stopped, puzzled.

The Picture Again

"Yer don't know me, sir?"

"I'm afraid I don't," said Richard.

"Bill Meggison—I was once groom up at Nestlecombe Hall, sir, years agone. Ain't yer Canon Elkin's nephew?"

"Yes, I am—and what are you doing here? I remember you now, Bill, and a smart groom you were. Have you fallen on evil days?"

"I've walked into 'em, sir, wi' my eyes open, but it's ower late now to go back to the country. Oh, sir, I wish I could. And the missus too. But I know what ye're arter down here, Mr. Richard. Yer'll be a-looking for a picture—a right lovely picture o' the Mother o' Sorrows."

"Indeed, I am," cried Richard. "Can you tell me anything about it?"

"I can show yer it, if yer'll come round the corner with me," said Bill, "and trust me honest."

"I will certainly trust you," said Richard. "You wouldn't deceive anybody from the old place."

"No, that I wouldn't. Come round here, sir. And look as if you didn't care two nothings for aught. Then yer'll see the picture."

It was another dingy place of old broken homes to which Richard was conducted—a darker, worse place than the last. There were some cheap and staring oleographs in the dirty window, in wide gilt frames, and between them, like a wild flower in a place of filth, Richard saw the face of haunting, sorrowful beauty which he had seen last in the Bloomsbury flat.

Under her delicate lace veil, that face looked out at him, and also at the sin-stained failure who stood by his side. Once again Richard was struck by the

fact that this was not a face to be worshipped, but a face of sorrowing sympathy with the sorrows of all mankind.

"Nay, but it's beautiful," burst from the broken-down groom. "It makes a man wish he'd never left the country."

"Come back to the country, Bill," said Richard. "I'll help you."

Bill shook his head.

"Yer don't mean it," he said.

"Well, we'll talk about it later. How did this picture come here?"

"Why, sir, you must know there's a gang as could tell yer where every picter worth anything is hanging. They'd had their eyes on this for a year or more, and when it were left to a parcel o' children, of course that was their chanst. One of 'em went down to Salisbury in that train and nabbed the parcel out o' the corridor. It was awful careless to leave it there."

"It was," agreed Richard. "And then?"

"Well, when they got it here they found out that it wasn't near so valuable as they'd thought. That chap with the queer name——"

"Botticelli?"

"That's him. It seems he only painted a bit of it, and they couldn't find out without a deal o' risk just what it was worth. So they called it a bad egg, and they've kept it dark till now. If you believe me, sir, it's on'y been in this winder a week, and my missus was casting about how she could let the young lady know. But she couldn't for shame write to old mistress's granddaughter when she'd fell so low herself."

The Picture Again

The old tumble-down buildings of the alleys around seemed to be falling about Richard. Old mistress's granddaughter! What could the man mean? And then suddenly, like a beam of light cleaving a dark ravine, it was all clear to Richard Elkin, and he blamed his own denseness not to have seen it for himself. And of course it made a tremendous barrier between him and Elinor—and his uncle had known that.

"Bill," he said, "isn't there a decent tea shop near here? Come in with me if there is, and tell me how to go about getting that picture."

"Oh ay, there's a swagger shop in Mile End Road —fit for any gent," said Bill. "But all you've got to do, is ter pretend as you wouldn't have it at no price, and yet yer might just as well carry it 'ome with yer and see how the missus likes it."

"Very well," agreed Richard. "I think I'd better commission you," and he followed his companion to the big reeking place, full of August heat, which Bill considered a "swagger" tea shop. There, over strong tea and coloured cakes, Richard got down into Bill's soul—and forgot the picture.

Neither of them had seen a pair of keen, black eyes above the hooked nose of a son of Israel that had watched them from the innermost recesses of the frowsy shop. But when they had gone, the Botticelli Madonna was carefully removed from the window, and packed up in paper and handed to a confederate. More than likely the stranger had gone off to fetch the police. When he came back half an hour later, prepared to open the campaign, the picture was nowhere on the premises. It had gone off through

a network of byways, nobody could tell where, under the arm of a dirty old Jew.

"Just like a parcel o' men," said Mrs. Meggison with contempt, when her husband brought Richard back and the two stared in dismay into the shop window. "Do you think as I'd have gone off to a tea shop and left that picter there? You must excuse me speaking so strong, sir, but you have muddled it, that you have. Such a losing o' chances calls for language."

Richard acknowledged that it did, when nothing he could do or say produced the picture. The dealer vowed such a thing had never been in his shop, and laughed in the gentleman's face. He tried to persuade him that it was an oleograph of a lady waiting for her lover at a gate that he had admired, and nothing would shake his declarations. Richard was obliged at length to take the Tube, a baffled man, with nothing to show for his pains but Bill Meggison's address.

He returned to Salisbury considerably crestfallen, and sat in the corner of his railway carriage turning over many things in his mind. He was not given to depression, but it was a very humble, disappointed Richard who appeared in the Close at dusk, and told his uncle all the story, including the tea shop and Bill's disclosure about the Tempests.

Coffee had just been brought into the library, but the lamp was not lighted. Richard could see his uncle's fine old face against the light left in the window. There was nobody so good to bring one's failures to as the old Canon. He always seemed to see a germ of success somewhere about them.

"You have done your best, boy," he said. "And no mortal could do more. It was unfortunate about the tea shop," and his old eyes twinkled. "But there again, you see, you got hold of Bill. We shall hear more of him, and he will owe his chance of a second manhood to you. Do you remember what the saint of Bemerton said?"

Richard smiled, but his uncle did not wait for an answer.

> "Sink not in spirit. Who aimeth at the sky
> Shoots higher much than he that means a tree . . .
> The sure traveller,
> Though he alights sometimes, still goeth on."

"I'm afraid what Bill told me worries me more than the picture," said Richard.

"My boy," returned his uncle, "the thread of life is tangled above all other threads, as Isaac Walton tells us in his life of the sweet saint. But that poet said himself, 'Love is a present for a mighty king.' If I read the maid's eyes aright, she won't say you nay, Richard."

"But the granddaughter of Mrs. Devale of Nestlecombe Hall."

"A fact she has scarcely learnt herself—and never profited by. Say rather, Roger Tempest's daughter, and he was ever a brave, good man, though sorely without the capacity for earning his living. He won't stand in your way."

"I'll plough up the very countryside to win her," declared Richard fervently.

His old uncle laughed gently. "I wish I were six-and-twenty, and found the world all obstacles, my boy," he said. "They are splendid stepping-

stones. But leave the plough alone a bit now, Richard—that will come soon enough. When George Herbert's parishioners heard the church bells of Bemerton, they used to let the plough rest in the fields, while they listened and prayed. The bells are beginning to ring for you Richard, if I am not mistaken. Stop and listen to them—ay, and pray for yourself too, but let the plough rest."

"Can one ever do that, uncle?" asked Richard. "That is, if he means to make anything out of life."

"You may make so much out, that you can only hear the din your own deeds have roused. Not much chance for the church bells then. When George Herbert found his pleasure in little lowly things, his fine friends remonstrated with him. But what did he say? That what he had done would be music to him at midnight."

"That was fine," said Richard, quick to recognise a true note.

"Fine? Yes, it was fine. The greatest things have a way of springing from little roots, but deep ones. Your soul will never be set on gold, Richard, before better things, for you would find it stubble when you came to handle it."

"Yet I would make a beautiful home for—for Elinor. Sometimes I think she has a hard time now."

"Yes—and it is making a woman of her, and writing a noble future on her face. Elinor will be a good woman, and she is her mother's own daughter. Nell would have believed with George Herbert, that gold and grace did never yet agree—though she could have done with a little gold all these years, poor lassie. Richard—listen.

'If souls be made of earthly mould
Let them love gold,
If born on high
Let them unto their kindred fly:
For they can never be at rest,
Till they regain their ancient nest.
Then, silly soul, take heed; for earthly joy
Is but a bubble, and makes thee a boy.'"

Richard did listen, while the quiet room grew dark, and the moon rose across the Close, and laid its beams about the lace-like carving, and the heavenward spire of the cathedral. Richard knew that he was a boy no longer, nor had any wish to be, and that life had become to him something very different from a bubble. He could see by his uncle's face where he sat looking through the window, that he was thinking of the past. Yet not of that far distant past in which he so often dwelt, where quaint George Herbert came across the Close to evensong. The old Canon was living over again those days at Nestlecombe, when spring touched everybody's life, yet left a sadness in some places and a hardness in others. He had lived in others' joys and sorrows then. As he looked back to them they were his own, and he longed for a happy ending, after twenty years, to that old story of love and tears.

Young Richard sat and pitied his uncle, because his heart was in the past. How cold and unlovely it must be, not to dwell on the edge of a romance that any day might make a fact. The thrills of life were over for the old man, mused the young one, but he forgot that his uncle dwelt for ever in its deeps.

The lamplighter came round the Close, and a maid brought lights into the library. Canon Elkin rose

and turned a serene face towards the dark one, so full of pity. He came up to Richard and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"I know what you are thinking, Richard," he said, with his rare smile. "You are pitying the old man because he is too old to be in love. Don't you know that I've been in love with Love Himself all my life? So I am a part of all other loves and live in them. I grow younger every day, Richie. If you don't mind, my future will be your past."

"I believe you, uncle," said Richard. "And I was thinking just that."

"You remember Herbert's friend, Dr. Donne. A rare man, that, though he had his little ways, like most of us old fellows. He told us how to measure the past, and what to do with it. You will like this, Richard:

> 'Who makes the past a pattern for next year
> Turns no new leaf, but still the same thing reads;
> Seen things he sees again, heard things doth hear,
> And makes his life but like a pair of beads.'

Perhaps my years have sometimes been like a pair of beads," mused the old man. "So I'm going to do a bold thing to-morrow. I'm going to see the old mistress of Nestlecombe Hall who turned me from her door twenty years ago."

"Uncle!"

"I am, lad; and then by way of a treat, if I still survive, suppose you and I call at Jessamine Cottage. I think I might venture to pass the lions of Hannah Snell's scrutiny if I have weathered the old mistress."

CHAPTER XII

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PAMELA

> But stay, what's there?
> Late when I would have something done,
> I had a motion to forbear,
> Yet I went on.
>
> —*George Herbert.*

PAMELA could not forget that birdcage. The night of Elinor's success and the visit to the Close, she dreamed about it what seemed to her all night, and rose in the morning with a secret intention of getting to the bottom of it. There must be other lovely things in that room, she was sure, and the spirit of adventure possessed her. She was determined that she, Pamela Tempest, would see them for herself.

"I might just creep up the great big stairs, if I went in at the front door instead of the window," she said to Binky, who received all her confidences. "Nobody would know I was there—and I think—it wouldn't be naughty. Nobody's told me not to, and grown-up people do tell you a most awful lot of things you mustn't do. There's Hannah, she's always saying she'll give me what for, if I do this or that. I don't know what what for is, because I'm seven now, and she's been going to give it to me ever since I was three. I've really forgot how to be frightened of it."

Binky barked.

"It's no use you barking, Binky, you know," said Pam. "Because *you* can't go. Indeed, I shall wait until after tea myself, when it's getting dusk and nobody won't notice what I'm doing."

All that day Pamela was very quiet, until Hannah asked her where the pain was, and Elinor felt her head and thought she must be feverish. But she replied indignantly that she was only thinking. As Elinor had a good deal of thinking to do on her own account, she laughed and said no more, so about seven o'clock Pamela set out on her voyage of discovery.

She had timed herself well, for Hannah had gone up to a neighbouring farm for butter, and Elinor was helping Antony with his lessons. Pam had never been out in the lanes so late before, and she ran through the village at the top of her speed as though she had a letter to post. She told herself she was not afraid—oh dear, no, nothing of the kind. Why should she be?—except—somewhere beneath the pink cotton frock she wore she had a thing called a conscience, and she was afraid it was going to be troublesome.

But of course she was not doing wrong, she said aloud, as she popped in at the green wooden door. Of course Hannah would not presently return to put her to bed, and be terrified when she found her gone. She would be back very soon, telling her adventures, and they would all laugh over them together.

Ah! What was that? Only a rabbit scurrying home across the path as fast as it could. Was it in this wood Antony said you might meet a fox on a moonlight night? And what if you did? Pam thought she would like to meet a fox.

But she looked round rather fearfully at the great dark trees that were waving their branches so far above, for the wind had risen. They did not seem to be the same leafy friends that Pamela loved so much by day. They never called to each other and shrieked so hard in the midday sun. But still in spite of their blackness underneath and their shrieks on top, Pamela kept on, for she was not easily turned aside from her often naughty little purposes. The path seemed much longer than in the afternoon, but at last she was at the end of it, and out through the hedge in the deserted lawn from which she had seen the birdcage.

It was almost dark now, and Pam's little heart was beating. She wished the sun had not been quite so quick to disappear, and was sure he went faster than usual.

"And there's a bumble bee bumbling home to his tea," she remarked aloud. "I wish he would bumble softer."

But the belated bee went past, for already he was late, and the silence seemed to swallow up Pam. She glanced at the birdcage, which she could only just see. There it swung, empty still.

"I would like to see up there—but p'r'aps—I'd better go back," she said. "If I could have brought Binky I wouldn't have minded."

She turned slowly away, and then something caught her sharp eyes. The little door in the old brick wall, which had been fast shut and overgrown with ivy, had been unfastened—nay, it was a tiny bit open. Little Pam could slip inside.

"An' I know there's a man in armour, because I

saw him through the keyhole, and he's not real, so I needn't be afraid of him. I b'lieve I'll go. I've never been afraid of the dark in all my life, for years and years, and I won't be now. Why, I'm seven."

She gave the door a little push and it opened wider. She went up on to the step and peeped in. Just within a tiny vestibule stood the man in armour. She could see him dimly outlined in the dark, and he looked rather awful and terribly still.

"But he's not real," she said again, and she stepped round him, though she was careful to keep her eyes on his steel vizor, and just a little bit afraid that it might drop and show her the face of the old "witch man" who sometimes haunted her dreams.

But nothing happened, and Pam came to the bottom of a winding oak staircase that went up between two walls. She boldly followed it, and mounted the twisting, winding way, gaining courage as she went upstairs, and drew near to the desired gilt cage.

Very soon she found herself on a wide empty landing with many doors all round her, and all of them shut but one. Pam stood still, and a funny sort of feeling came over her. How small she was in this big empty wing of Nestlecombe Hall. She thought of her little white bed at the cottage in Elinor's room, and she wished she was safe inside it. She thought of Blue Beard, and decided that it would be just as well not to open shut doors, for you never know what might be behind them, and she would run no risks. But why—here was the moon, suddenly shining out above the black trees, flooding the corridor with silver light, and streaming from the open door. Pamela was no longer afraid. She and the moon

had always been friends, for he used to look in at her, and she used to talk to him, when she was in bed in Bloomsbury. Town and country were all alike to the moon.

Pam trotted across to the open door, and stood on the threshold and looked in. When she did so, she clapped her hands, for it was the very biggest, loveliest nursery she had ever seen in her life.

In a far corner was a rocking-horse, old-fashioned enough, and with all its paint a thing of the past, but a rocking-horse for all that. There was a big cupboard that suggested unlimited dolls, and china tea-sets, and other delights. There were pictures on the walls of demure little children of long ago, who always behaved themselves, and above all there hung the empty birdcage, and near at hand it was more beautiful, and more truly like gold even than it had looked below.

Pam clapped her hands again.

"How glad I am I came. And fancy me being frightened. Why, it seems like a fairy nursery, with a rocking-horse all ready and nobody playing with it. And what's this? Why, I declare if it isn't our picture."

She had climbed on to a chair, and in the moonlight she could see a familiar picture hanging above the chimney-piece. It was a copy of the wonderful Madonna that had been stolen in the train, and Pam reached up and kissed it, as she had sometimes done before she went to bed in Bloomsbury. In the dim light, and to her eyes, it was the precious picture back, and she did not stop to wonder how it had found its way to Nestlecombe Hall. Elinor would be

glad, and so would mummy. Surely old mistress would let her take it home to the cottage.

"P'r'aps she buyed it at the door from the thief, like Hannah buys boot-laces," decided Pam. "Hannah often says she wonders if they have been honestly come by."

Away in the library and the housekeeper's room, no sound of Pam's revels came. Bennett dozed over his newspaper in the pantry as usual, and wished things were a little livelier, or that Miss Elizabeth would give them another tune.

Pamela rocked wildly on the old horse. Fortunately, he was still sound of limb, for he was surely a colt again just for to-night. Wooden he was, but there appeared to be a warlike spirit within him, for he tossed his mane and his moth-eaten tail with any charger new from the shops. Pamela galloped and cantered until she was out of breath, and then she began to wonder if she had better go home. It was long past her bedtime, and she was suspicious that she was growing very sleepy. She yawned ominously, and rubbed her eyes, and once she found herself nodding. How cosy looked that old broad couch covered with red chintz roses. There was a cushion all doubled up, as though somebody had just been there. Pam wondered if it were as comfy as it looked. She thought she would just try and see before she went downstairs again and found her way home. What a long dark walk it would be!

She lay down and stretched her slim legs on the couch, and rested her tumbled head on the cushion. How very comfortable it was, almost as—good as a—bed. Pam was nodding, and her eyes would shut;

she opened them with a violent effort, and turned over.

"I wish—Binky—was here," she murmured, but her eyes did not open again. On the old-fashioned couch, in the moonlight, of the deserted nursery, Pamela was fast asleep.

Meanwhile what was happening at Jessamine Cottage?

Hannah was longer than usual in coming back, and Elinor looked through the window with a smile when she saw her at the gate. For beside her walked the burly form of the successful milkman, and not even one of Hannah's severest frowns could hide the fact that she had enjoyed her stroll through the dusky barley fields.

Tony had finished his lessons, and sprawled on the sofa with a book of adventure. Elinor, in the window, was also deep in a book, and neither of them noticed the unusual silence of the cottage, or that Pamela's piping voice was nowhere to be heard.

It was Hannah who came up the path at a brisk tread, and looked severely in at the parlour door. She had been induced, against her will, to linger in the gloaming, and here were two more people equally misguided.

"Miss Elinor," she said sharply, "you are trying your eyes. And, Master Antony, go out, do, and let that howling Binky loose. I can't think what's got the dog. And where's Miss Pam? Don't tell me you've got her to bed, for I don't believe it."

Elinor and Tony looked up, both somewhat absently, but Hannah's voice demanded a reply.

"Pam—why, she was here just now. No, she's not

in bed. Where is Pam, Tony? I—I don't know, Hannah."

"In the garden, I expect," added Tony, going back to his book.

"She's not in the garden," said Hannah decidedly. "And it's nearly dark. Miss Elinor and Master Tony, don't you tell me you've gone and let that blessed lamb go off alone, like she's far too fond of doing, at this time of day. She's got the courage of a harmy, I know, but perhaps you don't know as there is gipsies in the lane beyond the little wood.

"Gipsies." Elinor sprang up in horror.

"Pooh," remarked Tony. "Pam isn't afraid of gipsies, and real gipsies never hurt a fly."

"Mebbe these isn't real, but only tinkers," said Hannah. "And for me, I wouldn't risk it. Put down them tiresome books and tell me where my lamb is."

"I don't know really, Hannah," said Elinor, coming out to the cottage door. "Pam! Pam! Where are you? Where are you hiding? Come out, Pam, and tell us, there's a dear."

But there was no answer. The village had grown quiet, the cows had all come home, the flowers in the garden stood up still and serene in the dusk—but there was no Pam.

Elinor ran upstairs. Could it be possible that Pamela had gone to bed without assistance, and before she was sent there. Such a thing was unheard of. But no—her little camp bed was undisturbed, and the room was silent and empty. Elinor looked under the bed and in the cupboard, but no chestnut curls burst out, no gay mischievous laugh answered. It was all too evident that Pamela had disappeared.

"She's never gone to the Hall at this time of night," cried Elinor, running downstairs again. "If she has, she is very naughty." Like many other people in sore anxiety, Elinor felt cross with the cause of it.

"Naughty or not naughty, we must look till we find her," cried Hannah, "if we sit up all night. Bless me, Miss Elinor, what would your poor ma say? This is a judgment on me for behavin' like a fool! Well, there's no fool like an old fool."

"Oh, we'll soon find Pam," put in Antony. "She can't be far off. I'll go down to the post-office and see if she's been there, and then I'll go to the gardener's cottage. You might try the gipsies, Hannah."

"I will so," said Hannah. "And it'll go hard with 'em if they don't give her up. That's where she is, you may take my word for it. Been led off by some woman in a red handkercher and earrings, while you two were deep in your books. I only hope I mayn't find her already stained a 'orrid brown with walnut juice, or worse still, the camp gone over the country side."

Elinor and Tony began to feel guilty when Hannah put it like that, and more than a little uneasy, though Tony tried to laugh.

"Him laughs best as laughs last," announced Hannah, bustling down the garden path and disappearing in the direction of the wood.

"Cheer up, Elinor," said Tony. "The gipsies haven't got Pam. She'll be back presently, and I'll be back in a jiffy. You wait for her here."

Tony went off to the post-office and Elinor paced

up and down the path, where the scent of sweet peas was so fragrant in the dusk. She peered along the white road, but no little flying figure came home, and the silence of the village grew unbearable.

"Oh, I can't stand this," said Elinor. "I must go and look for her. She must have gone to the Hall. I shall go and see, no matter what happens when I get there."

Tony came back, but less confident than he went. "The post-office people think they saw her flying along the road an hour ago, but they are not sure, and she has not been near the gardener's."

"Then I'm going to the Hall. You're not afraid to stay here alone, are you?"

"Afraid? What do you take me for?—a baby in arms? Somebody's got to stop and see if she comes."

A louder and longer howl from the distracted Binky came across the garden.

"I'll take Binky," said Elinor. "He'll find Pam if anybody can. He must know something is wrong, or he wouldn't make that noise."

Tony ran to the kennel and let him out

"Find Pam," cried Elinor, as the little shaggy dog leapt round her. Instantly Binky put his nose to the ground, and set off at a steady trot, looking round at Elinor to see if she followed.

She did, and he led her through the village, and towards the wall of the park.

"I thought so," remarked the girl. "Naughty Pam—but we shan't have the heart to scold her."

The green wooden door was ajar, as Pam had left it, and Elinor went in. She had never been inside the park before, and it seemed a vast and awful place

in the dark, and her own anxiety. What if she should find her little sister lying injured under one of these huge trees?

But nothing happened, and Binky kept on until he led Elinor out of the wood, into the open spaces, where the growing moonlight showed her the way.

Then Binky went through a hedge and snuffed about the creepers. But Elinor did not follow him there. She stood still, perplexed what to do, for she did not know her way, and she was not going to creep into Nestlecombe Hall like a thief, by a little back door.

Binky came back and whined in her face, but she pushed on through the park. Suddenly, round a corner, she came out in front of the splendid old house above its terrace; she saw the cypress-trees, and in the distance, the dim, shadowy lake. Even in this moment of anxiety Elinor stood still and marvelled. Could it be possible that her mother, who had been so contented in the Bloomsbury flat, had spent her girlhood here? Was it indeed from such a place as this that her own ancestry had sprung?

Unconsciously Elinor stiffened her shoulders and lifted her head. She was not going to be afraid, no matter how she was treated.

The moon gleamed out across the lake as she approached the terrace. She suddenly remembered the legend, and it struck her all at once how true it was, and that she was one of those herself who waited for forgiveness.

"The silver barge would indeed come home, then," she said. "Pam is right to believe in such things

after all. And Richard—I wonder what he would say. Would it make any difference? Oh, surely not."

Elinor was up the terrace steps by this time, and approaching the great door. To her surprise it was open, for dusk had become darkness now, and she stood on the threshold and looked timidly into the shadowy interior.

The men in armour seemed to look at her, the silence seemed to thrust her back, as one for whom there was no welcome there. But these same old treasures had once been familiar to her mother. Then she remembered Pamela and stepped inside.

There were few lights in the façade of the great house, but Elinor had noticed the illumined windows of what must surely be the library. She feared if she rang the bell she would be told by a pompous butler that her sister was not there, and she was sure she was. Taking a sudden resolution, she went into the hall and turned in the direction of the library. A moment or two later her hand was on the door, and she was knocking, and her heart beating wildly.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LOST LAMB

"Love God, and love your neighbour. Watch and pray,
Do as you would be done unto."
O dark instructions, e'en as dark as day!
Who can these Gordian knots undo?

—*George Herbert.*

ALL that day Miss Elizabeth Devale had waited for some sign from her mother, but it had not come. The hours had ticked away in their usual slow and stately fashion on the tall old clocks, and fussily, but no more quickly, on the little gilt ones.

Many a time Elizabeth had looked up from her work to see the old mistress gazing across the park, and there were new lines on her parchment-like face. But the day wore away to evening, and still she gave no sign that either tumult or victory was in her heart.

The reapers were busy in the barley fields. All day their song had come across the park, and the whirr of the binder as it went on its way through the falling ears. The shimmering golden waves were gone, but everybody was glad, because the time of harvest had come.

But now night was falling and the fields were silent, for the reapers had gone away. They had left rows

of sheaves behind them in the barley field. Surely, thought Elizabeth, one precious sheaf would be gathered in the old Hall to-night.

Bennett had brought the silver candlesticks and put them on the little table near the door. He had laid the heavy Bible, and the ponderous prayer-book with its family crest, before his mistress, and softly withdrawn.

Then the old lady looked up, and looked long at her daughter. At last she spoke, but only to say her usual formula when the clock struck nine.

"Ring the bell, Elizabeth."

Miss Elizabeth did so, and the maids filed in, the housekeeper's silk skirt rustling as it had done for a lifetime, and Bennett's solemn loud cough bringing up the rear as it never failed to do.

But surely the old mistress was a long time finding her place. She had a great love for the Old Testament, and it was not often that she read from the New. The household of Nestlecombe Hall was most accustomed to the militant Psalms.

But to-night Mrs. Devale turned the leaves of the family Bible with hesitancy. There was a faint flush in her white cheek, and she looked for an instant almost timidly towards the row of waiting servants.

Then, in a voice that actually trembled for a second, she began to read, while Elizabeth clasped her thin hands tightly on her knee, to keep from calling out.

"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost—until he find it. And when he hath found it,

he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends . . . saying, Rejoice with me. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."

Steady, yet vibrating with a great passion, a great desire, the voice of the old mistress had risen and fallen in the noble room where such words had not been heard for so long. Then there was silence, while nobody stirred, but everyone felt that something new and wonderful was going to happen. "What man of you . . . doth not go after that which was lost?" Every servant present was old and tried. They all knew the secret and the sorrow of Nestlecombe Hall. There was not one who would not gladly have gone after the lost—and brought her back in triumph.

Mrs. Devale did not open the big clasped prayer-book. She took up her gold spectacles with trembling hands, and wiped from them the tears that had made it difficult to read the story of the lost sheep. Then she stood up, and with one hand on the open Bible, she was evidently going to speak. But none will ever know what she meant to say, for at that moment there came a knock, loud and decisive, on the library door, and after a second's pause it was opened by a determined hand.

Who could be thus intruding an unwelcome presence at such a moment into Nestlecombe Hall? Mrs. Devale, Miss Elizabeth, and the long row of servants looked up. There, framed in the dark oak of the ancient doorway, stood a girl, young, radiant, beautiful, but with a look of distress on her face, knowing not what to say.

Miss Elizabeth recognised her, as did some of the servants, but as the old mistress looked across the room she did not see her granddaughter. She saw again youth standing at the door from which it had seemed to flee for ever—her own golden youth, so long forgotten, in the girl's face—and something more. She saw the youth and devotion of that man who had been, until he died, her lover, for this girl's face was his face when he wooed her fifty years before in the lanes between Nestlecombe and Salisbury.

"Oh, please," cried Elinor, seeing that she had in some way transfixed everybody present. "Where is little Pam? We have lost Pam—our baby. Don't tell me that she is not here."

She looked round the room wildly, and even in that moment Mrs. Devale recognised that she was gently bred and bravely nurtured, in spite of poverty and struggle.

Elizabeth went across to the girl and took her hand. "When did she disappear?" she asked. "She is not here, that we know of. But we will look everywhere."

The quiet voice steadied Elinor, and then she discovered that the maids had melted away, and she turned with a brave but shy gaze to her grandmother.

"Forgive me," she said. "I know you do not want us. And indeed, I did not know when we came, and little Pam does not know now. If you will let someone look for her, she shall not trouble you again."

A great pain crossed the face of the old mistress. At that moment she was punished by a girl's innocent voice, as the years had not punished her.

"My child," she said, and her daughter started, for she did not recognise her voice, "little Pamela has made us all love her. She has shown us ourselves. You are my grandchildren. I want you to forgive me."

Elinor staggered back against the oak wall, and could not speak. Hannah's prophecies always did come true, but she had never thought to find a reception like this. She almost forgot that Pam was lost.

"And mother?" she asked faintly.

"Your father and mother must come home to Nestlecombe Hall. Your troubles are over, Elinor. In future somebody else will bear them."

"Oh," breathed the girl, and she did not know until that moment how heavy the burden had been sometimes, "I'm so glad— you don't know what it means."

Miss Elizabeth kissed her niece, and Elinor had no conception what this little scene meant to the older woman. She took the girl's hand and drew it through her arm.

"Come with me," she said. "We will look for Pam. I believe she has set out to explore the Hall, and we may find her in some corner, fast asleep."

She took up one of the silver candlesticks and gave another to Elinor. To her surprise her mother followed, and the three went out of the room and up the broad staircase, where the candle-light flickered on the sombre portraits of dead and gone Devales.

Miss Elizabeth seemed to know which way to go, for in her own heart she was sure that Pamela had gone to look for the birdcage. She led the way across the gallery above, and turned into the long

corridor. Pushing open the red baize doors she held her light aloft while the other two stepped into the big empty landing, where only the moonlight was at home. Then she pointed to the open door of the nursery.

"I believe you will find her there," she said.

It was the old mistress who went first, while Elinor eagerly followed. But they stopped at the door and looked into the room. The moon rode high now above the park, and the deserted nursery was full of light. The chairs had been dragged together into the middle, when Pam's solitary fun was at its height. The moth-eaten charger stood still and dejected, out of his accustomed corner. His sudden friskiness was over, and he was an old horse again.

Elinor only glanced at the horse, for it was the two older women who saw that the nursery had been a place for a romp again after its long silence. Elinor looked beyond. There, in the moonlight, on the broad old couch, her arms outspread, her face rosy, and with tangled curls, lay Pamela Tempest, as fast and as innocently asleep as if she were in her own camp bed at the cottage.

A tremendous relief came over Elinor, and she realised that she was very tired. After all, it had been exceedingly naughty of Pam to do like this. Like many another when her anxiety was relieved, Elinor felt annoyed with the cause. A strange and uncomfortable shyness possessed her. She did not know what to do next, or what to say to these two tall women who belonged to her, and yet were strangers. But the old mistress took charge of affairs.

She went across to the couch with the step of a

young woman, and gently lifted the sleeping child with words she had not used for more than forty years. Pamela, not half-awake, threw her arms round the old lady's neck, and the crimson cheek lay beside the white one, while the rough chestnut curls mingled with the long muslin strings of her grandmother's cap.

"Oh, let me take her," cried Elinor. "Pam is very heavy."

But the old mistress shook her head, and the little procession went back to the lighted corridor, and down to the library again. There Pamela opened her eyes, to find herself sitting on her grandmother's knee in the Jacobean chair, with Elinor opposite, and Binky licking her hand, and wondering surely what had happened.

Pam sat up and rubbed her eyes.

"Where am I?" she asked. "Is it the middle of the night? Elinor—you said you'd never, never come to the Hall, and you have. How did Binky get here? And why, I'm sitting on old mistress's knee. Old mistress—I thought you didn't like little girls on your knee. You said it was old and stiff."

"Pamela," said her grandmother softly, "you will have to get a new name for me. I am your grannie, my dear."

"My—what? But Hannah said that nature and grace had both robbed us of a grannie. Have you been my grannie all the time?"

"Yes—all the time."

"And are you Elinor's grannie—and Tony's?"

"Yes."

Pamela looked at her. Then she threw her arms

round the old lady's neck and kissed her again and again. "I always knowed you were a grannie," she said. "Don't you remember—the first time I came? I'd thought you were an ogre, but when I saw you—I knowed you were a grannie. But you said you were not—it's very puzzling. What's made you my grannie?"

There was a pause. Nobody wanted to tell little, trusting Pamela that her grandmother had possessed a hard cold heart for long years, and that she herself had softened it.

But she answered her own question, as people of seven years old are often best able to do.

"I know," she said—"I know. It's the barge. It's coming. The silver barge is coming. Tell me quick, has somebody been forgiven for love's dear sake?"

"Yes, darling," said Miss Elizabeth, "somebody has—and so you have got a grannie."

"We have been forgiven, Pam," said Elinor. "We were the ones that our grandmother had to forgive."

"Us?" cried Pam. "Did you truly have to forgive *us* for love's dear sake, old mistress, before the silver barge could float on the lake?"

The old mistress's lips were trembling so that she could scarcely answer.

"I am the one to be forgiven," she murmured—"I—not Nell—am the lost sheep. But the Shepherd has found me."

"Are we prodigals, please?" whispered Pam, in an awed voice. "Because if we are there ought to be a fatted calf. I've always wondered what it tasted like when I've heard it read at church. And please, grannie, Elinor and me, we've had no supper.

I'm awful hungry, and I expect she is too, but she's big, so she pretends she isn't."

Miss Elizabeth rose and rang the bell with an exclamation of dismay. As she did so she heard her mother say to Pam, "Yes, there shall be a fatted calf, Pam, but not yet, my dear. When your father and mother come home, we will have the fatted calf."

Pamela clapped her hands. "Are they coming here—to this lovely, beautiful, splendid Hall?"

"I hope so—if they are willing."

"Why, they would love to—and Elinor—the picture's found. It's in that room where I were asleep, where the jolly horse is. Oh, grannie, can't we all come here—when mummy and daddy come home? And Binky—you know he is Binky Tempest. I couldn't really have a grannie unless she was Binky's grannie too. Will you be Binky's grannie, old mistress?"

Binky, hearing his name mentioned, waddled up to the old lady and put his paws on her knee beside Pam. He could not make it out at all, but his family seemed to be happy, so he licked whatever came nearest, and that was enough for Binky Tempest.

"Yes—I must be Binky's grannie too, I suppose," said the old lady with a smile, bestowing a pat on the dog's shaggy head as he looked up at her with two appealing eyes.

It was Bennett who brought in such a dainty supper as Elinor and Pam had not seen since they could remember, and he had hard work not to ask to shake hands with them, and to stop the tears from rolling down his decorous cheeks. Bennett prided himself upon his impersonally wooden attitude, but it had

forsaken him to-night. When Miss Elizabeth told him to go to the village and tell Hannah what had happened, and that the girls would stay at the Hall until morning, he ran down the avenue under the yew-trees, his swallow-tails flying out behind him, like a boy. Those old trees, so dark and stately in the moonlight, were surely surprised at what they saw that night.

Bennett did not stop to knock at the door of Jessamine Cottage. He burst into the kitchen, where Hannah had returned from the gipsies with a very unsatisfactory tale. She was in the middle of scolding Antony for letting his sister go off alone to the Hall.

"Hannah Snell. The millennium's dawned," cried the butler, appearing like a breathless apparition. "Little miss is at this minute a-sitting on her grandmother's knee, eating chicken, and the Lord be praised. And Miss Tempest is alongside. All's forgave and forgotten, and Miss Nell is to be sent for. They ain't coming home to-night, and you're to send Master Antony up to breakfast."

Hannah stood with her mouth wide open, arrested in the middle of a word. Then she sat down suddenly and did what she had not done since she could remember. She threw her apron over her head and burst into tears.

"The Lord be praised," she said, swaying herself to and fro. "Talk about the mouths o' babes—I knew it was coming. And now my work's finished. You can take Hannah Snell and lay her under the yew-trees in Nestlecombe churchyard.

"Nothing o' the sort," cried Bennett, giving Hannah a hearty slap on the back. "Dick Raven 'd have a

word or two to say to that. Your life's goin' to be hearty now. Get up and enjoy it."

Hannah sniffed. "Well, after all I might as well," she said. "If swords is going to become ploughshares at Nestlecombe Hall, and the old days come back, I'd like to be in it. But Raven me no ravens, Mr. Bennett, *if* you please. My own business is all as I have time to mind, when I've done wi' minding the Tempest family. And, Master Antony, if you've got to have your breakfast with your grannie, I believe you've only one clean collar, and that frayed at the edges. Late or not, where's the starch? You shan't disgrace the missus, or my name ain't Hannah Snell."

"Oh, Hannah, need I go?" said Antony. "I hate scenes and grand houses. I'd far rather have the cottage."

"Go?" cried Hannah. "Of course you must go. 'Tisn't every day you find a grannie, and with landed acres behind her at that. Why, lad! you are the future squire o' Nestlecombe, if you behave yourself. See to it you are as good a one as your grandfather was."

There was little sleep for Hannah that night, but indeed she did not think that her spirit would ever be still enough to sleep again. A row of immaculate collars and a well-brushed suit hung before the kitchen fire before she attempted to retire. She stood, candle in hand, and regarded them complacently. "Them collars belongs to the heir," she said—"to the heir o' Nestlecombe, for I feel it in my bones. My, but I'm glad to have lived to see this day. Acres make a better livelihood than ink, and my children are made."

She was up at dawn, but she did not acknowledge to herself that it was because she was so anxious to

tell Dick Raven. He saw good news in her face, and was immensely flattered to find her waiting for him with the milk-jug.

"We are made for life," she said. "The young ladies is up at the Hall, and Master Antony's just a-going to his breakfast. See him going down the road. That's the heir o' Nestlecombe."

"Well, well," said Dick, lifting his shining milk-can, and pouring the white froth into Hannah's jug. "Ye've made a deal of excuses o' them Tempests, my girl, but it won't do no longer. You reckon to admire a faithful 'eart in some places." He pointed to his chest. "Don't forget this 'ere," he said.

"Ah, well" — Hannah had never sounded so gracious. "An idle head is a bag for the wind. I'd have to have some sort of occupation or I'd die."

"Milking's quite a pleasant pastime," said Dick as he went away.

"Hum! You can keep your cows," Hannah called after him. "I've always dealt with 'earts."

"There's good 'earts has to put up with cows for company," Dick responded from over the hedge.

Antony found no scenes awaiting him at Nestlecombe Hall, but only a pleasant breakfast with his sisters, over which Aunt Elizabeth presided. He was somewhat awed by the grandeur of his surroundings, and by Bennett's attentions, but seeing how much at home little Pam was, and how Elinor enjoyed her new environment, he tried to grow reconciled. The old lady in the library window was more like her usual self this morning when she came downstairs, but she spoke very kindly to her grandson, and looked him up and down with satisfaction.

"Yes," she said. "You have the right stuff in you. You would stand up for your kind."

Then she turned again to little Pamela, who was to be to her the child of her old age.

As the children stood beside her, a loud clanging bell pealed through the house. It was not three times in a year that a visitor came to Nestlecombe Hall, and Bennett bustled out with a good deal of apprehension in his round face.

Twenty years before it had fallen to his unwilling lot to turn Canon Elkin from the door. Now, for the second time in twenty-four hours, he forgot himself and smiled the welcome he felt.

"Is Mrs. Devale at home, Bennett?" inquired the Canon, as though he had called but yesterday.

"She is, sir," replied Bennett confidentially. "And the family's come back, sir—leastways, part of it. This is a great day at the 'All, sir. I'm glad you've come."

"So am I," said the old Canon, and Bennett flung back the library door and announced him with such a flourish as he had not dared to use for twenty years. But the clouds had parted, and the long hidden sun shone full again upon the ancient house.

Mrs. Devale saw her old friend coming to her across the library. He had been in her thoughts all night, for he was part of the old things that were to come again. He looked no older to her, and as he crossed the room the twenty years of estrangement rolled away. She rose to meet him, and he took her hand.

"Old friend," he said, "the time has been long since we parted last, and you have found it, as good Nicholas

Ferrer said, 'A nothing between two dishes,' but it is past."

"Yes, yes, Canon," agreed the old mistress. "And I did you an injustice. Are you willing to come back to the Hall as a friend? And can there ever be peace for me?"

"Ay, ay, to both counts, madam. The peace which the world can neither give nor take away, and which will indeed be yours. Was it not that holy man, Ferrer, who said again, 'There ought to be a vacancy between fighting and dying.' We have known much of one, friend, and some day we shall know the other. But the best of lights—the evening light—lies between."

"Thank God!" breathed the old mistress, and, "Let us pray," said the Canon with lifted hand, looking round towards Miss Elizabeth, whose heart was satisfied at last, and to the young faces that were towards the future.

CHAPTER XIV

A JOURNEY TO THE SOUTH

Give me the pliant mind, whose gentle measure
Complies and suits with all estates ;
Which can let loose to a crown, and yet with pleasure
Take up within a cloister's gates.

—*George Herbert.*

THE Continental boat train was getting up steam in Charing Cross station on an early September afternoon. Porters were hurrying to and fro with trucks of luggage labelled Milan. Excited girls going abroad for the first time were shrieking to each other. Experienced travellers were complaining loudly to harassed officials, and in the midst of the bustle a small group of people came serenely down the platform, inwardly as excited as any.

One was Canon Elkin, who had offered his escort after many years to conduct Miss Elizabeth Devale to Florence, where she was going in person to tell her sister all the wonderful story that had happened at Nestlecombe. After twenty years' service, she was going to have a holiday, who had scarcely in that time seen London. She had left Elinor and Pam in charge of the old mistress, who had indeed sent her, in somewhat peremptory fashion, to find her sister and bring her home.

A first-class carriage was reserved for Miss Elizabeth and her maid, and she was pressing the Canon to join her, when he suddenly noticed a dark, oily-faced Jew, who sauntered down the platform with a big flat case under his arm. He pointed him out to Richard, but the man's face conveyed nothing to his nephew.

"It does to me though," said Canon Elkin. "If we only had Bill here, my suspicions would be confirmed, but Bill has gone down to Nestlecombe, you said, to make arrangements for moving into that empty cottage. Well, I must use my eyes and my common sense. Good-bye, my boy. Don't let your wits go wool-gathering while I'm away."

The guard blew his whistle, the long train moved off, and for the first time Miss Elizabeth saw the blue waters of the Channel, and went aboard the steamer with some trepidation. But it was a warm, cloudless September day, and nobody was ill. In less than an hour the great cross that broods above Boulogne was visible, the blue-gowned viragos were shrieking their wares on the quay, and Miss Devale found herself snug within an empty carriage, watching the personally conducted tours who came up frantic in their desire for seats.

The night passed. Miss Elizabeth hardly knew how, for every turn of those iron wheels was taking her back to Nell. When morning dawned, she looked from her carriage window on the *châlets* of Switzerland, and the sweet fresh air of the snows came in and gave her new life.

She left her seat and, going into the corridor, she stood at the window. Away to the right she was

watching the clouds, as they drifted across the blue. Then—suddenly, she saw that they were not clouds, those far white peaks above the lower mist. That wonderful thing had come to her—a first sight of the eternal white crests of the Alps.

"Oh, it's like my life," she said. "The clouds have become mountain peaks."

"They have, Elizabeth," said Canon Elkin at her elbow. "'Then by a sunbeam I will climb to Thee.' You remember that. It's to be that way with you in the future. I could almost envy you this dawn at a time when you may read its meaning."

Slowly the train passed the majesty of wonder that lies about Lucerne, and Elizabeth, in spite of her fatigue, spent the morning at the window.

They were travelling as straight as possible, and the night was to be spent at Milan. Canon Elkin found a friend in a second-class carriage and went to join him for a time. When he returned his face was grave.

"If I'm not mistaken I'm on the track of something," he said. "Wait until we get to the frontier. There's a man in there wonderfully like a Jew who once had a shop in Salisbury. My idea is that he is off to Italy with the Botticelli Madonna under his arm."

"Impossible," cried Elizabeth.

"I don't think so," said the Canon, rubbing his hands together. "It will be quite a joke if the old man finds the picture that has baffled the young lawyer."

The train wound its way through the weary hours between magnificent gorges and mountain peaks. Here was a glimpse of a lake of liquid blue, there a hillside clothed and crowned with vines and

olives. They were nearing the wonderful south, and the colour and charm of Italy.

Just before the frontier was reached, Canon Elkin went back to join his friend, for in the corner of that second-class carriage sat the Jew fast asleep, his flat case under the seat. Suddenly down the corridor came a stentorian sound, familiar enough to the seasoned traveller, but with a note of terror in it to the new one. Surely that is a gendarme, with his coloured shoulder knots, uncomfortably reminiscent of the French Revolution. But no, it is but the Customs—those tiresome overhaulers of carefully packed luggage, and disturbers of British naps.

The Canon produced his hand-bag, but it was passed over with a smile. Not so, however, the Jew's belongings in the corner, where he was evidently now feigning sleep. The officers pushed their long rods under the seats and raked out the large flat case. Then, with many a gesticulation and angry protest, they demanded that it should be opened.

The Jew shook his head, spread out his hands, and shrugged his shoulders. His black moustache almost disappeared under his hooked nose, and he assured the Customs' officers, in broken Italian, that the parcel only contained fragile curios of no value, but delicate to unpack. The more he asserted, the louder grew the voices of the officers as they demanded and threatened. People began to stroll down the corridor to see what was happening, and Canon Elkin kept his seat, while the Jew glanced now and then in his direction.

In the end his protests made the officers almost violent, and the leather case was so nearly torn

open that the reluctant Jew produced the key. With dirty trembling hands he fumbled with the lock, and threw back the cover. The Italians leant over eagerly to see what it was that he had been so eager to hide. *Bella Vista!* It was but a picture without a frame—the face of a Madonna under a lace veil, the colours somewhat dim with age, the wistful beauty of the face having no appeal to a couple of Customs' officers who had been hindered long enough. Such pictures were as common as olives in Italy, and were more often carried out than in.

With furious faces the two officers signalled to him to pack up his picture, and in a torrent of Italian, which they appear to think all nations understand, upbraided him for the hoax. The Jew only shrugged his shoulders and smiled a somewhat sinister smile, as he re-fastened his straps, and turned his head idly away to look from the window.

The Customs' officers went away, and the idle passengers followed them. After a while the train went down the St. Gothard tunnel and everybody fell asleep. When it came out again Canon Elkin was sitting opposite to the Jew, and tapped him on the knee to attract his attention.

The man looked up with a start and frowned.

"I think you once kept a picture shop in Salisbury," said Canon Elkin. "I don't often forget a face in the old town."

The man shook his head, and feigned ignorance of English.

"You know English as well as I do," went on the Canon, "for I heard you speak it on the Channel steamer. I have kept you in sight from Charing

Cross, because that picture you are carrying has not been honestly gained. Whether you know it or not, that Madonna has been stolen from a family well known to me, and is of value. It was taken from the corridor of the Salisbury train last February, and it will be for you to prove whether you took it. Unless you can clear yourself by a full confession, I give you in charge at Turin. It was you who hustled that picture out of an East End shop three weeks ago, and now you are trying to dispose of it."

Perhaps the methods of Canon Elkin would not have succeeded with a more desperate man than the slatternly Jew. But the latter had his own reasons for keeping himself out of the public eye, and they were worth more to him than the picture. He poured out a torrent of excuses and indignation against some unknown person, who had deceived him. He was on his way to his sick wife in Rome, and a friend had commissioned him to carry that parcel to a certain firm in the Via Condottori. He was entirely ignorant of the value of it, or anything about it. He was but doing a kindness to a friend, and he would see to it that it was a long day before he did another.

He further added, with a frightened face, for he saw that his game was up, having recognised Canon Elkin from the first, that his friend would be only too glad to sell the old thing for a couple of sovereigns, if the gentleman had a fancy to buy it. Then, if it were indeed a stolen treasure, he might restore it to its owner.

"The owner is now at Florence," said Canon Elkin. "And I will let you off with the fright you have

richly deserved, and foolishly pay you the money, if you hand me over the picture quietly. If not, I give you in charge at the next station."

The man sulkily took out the precious Madonna, and Canon Elkin's friend produced a sheet of paper. The picture was done up into a brown paper parcel, handed to the Canon for the sum of two guineas, and when the train stopped at Turin, the Jew slipped out and disappeared into the cosmopolitan crowd, to be seen no more by the Tempests or their friends.

"I've got it," said Canon Elkin, when he rejoined Miss Elizabeth. "To-morrow Nell shall have her treasure again, as well as her sister—and if I were she, I should sell it."

That next afternoon was a mellow, sunny one in the beautiful city of Florence. Up on the hills that encircled it, the grapes were gathered; and the *contadina* went up and down the winding road to Fiesole. Mrs. Tempest stood at the narrow window of her sitting-room in the high house that looked out upon the piazza before the wonderful Duomo. She had not been many days in Florence, for she and her husband had begun to turn their faces homeward, but Florence would always be to her a golden memory, a place where happiness came back, and success seemed to lurk. She looked into the room towards her husband, who sat writing at the table. Could it be possible that the bronzed man, with strength in his every attitude, with a new hope in his eyes and his heart, could be the tired invalid who had felt himself to be a failure, whom she had taken to the snows.

He had written his great book there, and as he read

it aloud to her, she had known it to be a good one, straight from his brave, chivalrous heart. The precious manuscript was going back with them to London, and already a publisher had almost been found for it.

Only this morning the post had brought further offers of work from a paper much higher in the literary world than the one that had sent Roger Tempest away. He was busy now in the old Florentine house, with a sheaf of delicate little sketches, suggested by his travels, which his wife was sure would make his name and fame. There was coming a golden afterglow to all the troubles of the past. It might even be possible to live no longer in Bloomsbury, but to have Jessamine Cottage enlarged to make a home where they might all live together and be happy.

Mrs. Tempest looked out across the beautiful place before her to the cathedral of white marble, flushed with pink, which is surely the most beautiful material, thing in the world. Her eyes fell upon that wonderful bell-tower of Giotto's, and it preached her a sermon as it had been doing ever since she came to Florence. How slender, and wonderful, and perfectly fashioned it was. What was it that gave it that strange indefinable charm that everybody felt in it, whether they understood its art or not? Was it not the fact that this campanile was the crown of Giotto's life? The little shepherd boy found by Cimabue drawing his own sheep, had never relaxed his best. His life had been greater than his work, and its last act had been this glowing campanile.

The Englishwoman's eyes went next from the tower to the teeming space below. There the trams started

for Fiesole, bombarded by struggling Italians and determined Americans. There the little boys sold postcards and bronzes, and tried to talk English slang, while the small Italian girls thrust nosegays into the faces of tourists. Across the way was the Baptistery, and the stream of priests passed in and out with inert, lifeless faces, lifting their gowns like women as they crossed the muddy square. But behind them again was another silent witness to those old beautiful lives lived long ago in Italy—the wonderful bronze gates designed by Ghiberti, that took twenty years of thinking, and which Michael Angelo, passing one day, said were fit to be the gates of heaven.

The modern tourists and screaming vendors, the priests and the multitude, passed away from Mrs. Tempest's vision, and she saw again those old immortals who once trod the streets of Florence. Here came Fra Angelico, the Christ-like painter, with his beautiful face; there came dark-eyed Dante, watching at the corner for Beatrice, whose face "had made his life both proud and glad."

"That's just it," said Mrs. Tempest to herself, "work that does not make life braver and better is not worth doing. Noble work and a great life are better than success."

So she mused, not knowing what even at that moment was coming back into her own life. She still sat at the window, and though her vision had faded, she scarcely saw the crowds. She was watching the beauty of the shadows across the black and white marble.

Suddenly a little carriage came round the corner from the direction of the railway station. It was one

of those familiar enough in Italy, with a huge umbrella over the sensitive driver, the drippings of which fall on to the necks of tourists. But to Mrs. Tempest, as she watched it, there was suddenly something ominous about it. She could just see that it contained a tall lady and a white-haired gentleman, with a brown-paper parcel under his arm. She did not know either of them, though they looked English, and the old man gazed up and about as though be looked for something other than the beauty around him.

There was something familiar in the poise of his shoulders and the way he held his head slightly on one side. Ah, he was smiling at his dark-haired companion. He seemed to be reassuring her—and the carriage was coming very slowly in the direction of the tall house where the Tempests were staying.

Mrs. Tempest rose to her feet, which suddenly seemed unable to support her. That was not a strange face in the little rickety carriage. It was a beloved one from out the past, which had once been that of her best friend, and only a little older, a little happier than it used to be.

And who could be the tall woman who looked so white and anxious? Her own heart told her. The last time she had seen her sister Elizabeth, it was to take a hurried farewell of a half-sleeping girl whom she did not wish to suffer for her own deeds. But in this stately, sorrowful-faced woman she knew that girl again, and her heart leapt up to meet her.

"Roger," she cried—"Roger! Look out of the window—I can't tell you why."

Mrs. Tempest opened the door of the sitting-room and ran out of her little piazza. There, coming up the

stone stairs, were the two visitors, the old Canon still with the brown-paper parcel under his arm, as he mounted the steps like a boy.

Miss Elizabeth looked up into the cool dimness after the glare of the piazza below, and saw her sister Nell's beautiful face as she remembered it, but with all the struggle and the victories of the years between added to its charm. She saw there Elinor, as she would some day be, and in her face the father whom they had once both loved, and she opened her arms and ran forward, to hold her sister to her heart. The years of silence had not been her fault, but in this supreme moment she wished she had possessed the courage to break through their iron bond. But it was one thing to feel this in Italy, and another to have acted upon it at Nestlecombe Hall under the rule of the old mistress.

The Canon had put down his parcel, and was explaining matters to Roger Tempest, who held his old thin hand, and wrung it at intervals as though he would never let it go again.

"Roger," said the old man, "why have you kept yourself away from me all these years?"

"I didn't want you to see me, Canon. I'd made nothing out."

"Made nothing out? What about those fine children of yours, who have taken more hearts than mine by storm in the old place! You will have forgotten George Herbert. He said, 'The best mirror is an old friend.'"

"I have no doubt he was right," agreed Roger Tempest. "We have all made mistakes—but you. Shall we have time to undo some of them, I wonder?"

"You will—and opportunity," said Canon Elkin, turning to Mrs. Tempest, who had brought her sister back into the room and was looking eagerly for an explanation. "You have been through the valley of the shadow, Nell, and maybe that other valley—the one of humiliation; but you are coming to the green pastures next. Do you remember?

'He leads me to the tender grass,
Where I both feed and rest,
Then to the streams that gently pass,
In both I have the best.'"

The woman who had known so many brave struggles smiled. "Yes, I remember," she said. "I was ten years old when you taught me that, Canon. Many a time in the years gone by your voice has echoed in my mind with the words of George Herbert, as you used to tell us about him in the cathedral."

"And as I have ventured to tell your daughter Elinor since you saw her," said the old man delightedly. "And now pack your boxes, and say good-bye to Italy. We are all going home together, to be happy in those simple things and simple ways that are the real great ones. Life has much in store for you yet, but the old man is ready to sing that *Nunc dimittis* of Dr. Donne:—

'Since I am coming to that holy room
Where, with Thy choir of saints, for evermore
I shall be made Thy music, as I come
I tune my instrument here at the door.'"

"As you have tuned many another's," said his old friend softly.

CHAPTER XV

SAINT MARTIN'S SUMMER

"A guest," I answered, "worthy to be here,"
Love said, "You shall be he."
"I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on thee."
Love took my hand, and smiling, did reply,
"Who made the eyes but I."

—*George Herbert.*

A WONDERFUL Saint Martin's summer came to the south country that year. The days passed, and September was over. All the corn had been carried, all the harvest fields were bare of sheaves, and the rest of the year had come down upon the earth. But still the days were warm and filled with mellow sunlight that seemed to hover about the Cathedral Close like a living gracious presence.

Never had the creepers been so red upon the bishop's palace, upon the old Hall of Nestlecombe, and upon the walls of Jessamine Cottage. The village gardens were gay with chrysanthemums and dahlias, and no frost came to spoil them. Even the roses could not give up blooming, as though they knew it was a wonderful summer to somebody, and here and there in a sheltered corner a few primroses mistook it for spring, and came out.

The Sail of the Silver Barge

The great front door of Nestlecombe Hall was always open now. It was no uncommon thing to hear the clang of a bell through the house, and there was even new chintz covered with roses in the big drawing-room where Miss Elizabeth had never cared to sit alone. It was a pleasant place now, with Mrs. Tempest's books and needlework, and Pamela's doll occupying a lordly chair. The sound of childish laughter rang about the terrace all day, mingling with boyish mirth, and Elinor's voice, from which everything had gone but happiness and hope.

Even the old mistress would pause in her work and look out to watch the children, who were daily creeping nearer to her heart. And though it was Pamela racing after Binky across the lawns who brought the smiles to her thin lips and the tears to her old eyes, yet she often gazed with pride after Antony's straight growing figure, that country life had made strong. She looked forward to a time she might not see, when he should be master of Nestlecombe, and her heart was at its humblest when she prayed that he might be a better landowner than she had been, because, like that Antony of the old tradition, he should love his people well.

October had come, and the trees had all turned to a living russet, but had lost none of their leaves. All the country-side was gold, and the distant downs were set in a frame of blue. The woods had turned to many colours; the fallow fields beautified the landscape with their idleness. In the lives lived below many fallow things had sprung again.

Elinor came out of the door of Jessamine Cottage, which was still her home, and walked down the flagged path, watched, although she did not know it, by

Hannah from the kitchen window, and by her mother from the parlour. Both felt that something wonderful was very near to the girl they loved that day.

Elinor went through the village street and down the road towards Salisbury, for it was Saturday afternoon, and she had half-promised that anyone who happened to come that way might find her by the wayside. She had a book in her hand, but she did not read it as she strolled along. She had never meant to read it, but Elinor found it necessary sometimes just now to protect herself from other people's questions. She had not gone very far along the green ways when she saw somebody coming who made her slacken her steps, and look demurely into the scarlet hedges from under her shady hat.

Richard Elkin took her hand, and had very little to say, and Elinor herself was shy with a new shyness that, if he had but known it, said how glad she was to see him.

But this was a new Elinor in more than that. The simple blue gown and the pretty hat were very plain and becoming, but there was an unmistakable grace about them that Richard felt though he could not define it. And it would never have occurred to him that they had been chosen by Miss Elizabeth and represented more money than Elinor had ever worn before.

He only thought how alluringly sweet and dainty she looked, and more charming than he had ever known her. He had come out this afternoon to tell her something, but when he walked beside her he scarcely knew how to begin. He thought she knew it already, and yet he was full of fears. What if the question he meant to ask her should put an end to the

charmed companionship of this radiant summer, that seemed as though it would never die?

They turned out of the high road into the stubble fields, and beside the border of the woods. Away above the level fields rose the slender spire of the cathedral, dreaming into the sky. What was their little love story to its great history? It had seen so many lives and lovers come and go. Yet their story was eternal, and it, after all, did but belong to the chances and changes of this mortal life.

"Come into the woods," said Richard suddenly.

"But may we? The keepers are terribly strict about what Pam calls the 'games' just now."

Richard laughed, but his voice was determined. "Oh, bother the games! They are your grandmother's woods, worse luck; surely you might walk through them."

"I am not at all sure." But Elinor followed him over the stile, and up the path that led to the top of a little round knoll. There, under the great golden trees, they could see the distant roofs of Nestlecombe Hall, the village amid its protecting branches, and the wide slopes and fat farms that belonged to the old mistress.

"Why do you say 'worse luck'?" asked Elinor simply, and then, as he turned and looked into her eyes, she knew.

He hesitated for a moment, seeking for words that will not come when a heart is to be told. Richard Elkin could draw up a lawsuit, and give his mind to a case, but his heart was too full for a graceful wooing. He could only be sincere and straightforward like the country-born Englishman that he was.

"Oh, Elinor," he said, as they stopped in the golden shadow of an oak-tree, "don't you know why? Don't you know I love you and want you all the time? And I'm only a country lawyer, and a simple sort of fellow—while you—are the old mistress's granddaughter."

There was a moment's silence. Then Elinor lifted her face, and touched his arm for a second with her fingers.

"It's never been much of an advantage," she said. "I shouldn't like it to follow me all my life. That is for Antony and Pam, Richard. They will grow up to a very different life, but I—would always rather be Elinor Tempest of Jessamine Cottage. I love cottages better than halls. They have more happiness in them —and more——"

She paused.

Richard took her hands and held them fast. He looked down under the shady hat, and kissed her sweet face as he had so often done in his dreams and sometimes feared he never might in blissful reality.

"More love, isn't there, sweetheart?" he whispered. "Were you going to say that?"

"Perhaps I was."

But Elinor had no more to say. They sat down on the bank strewn with golden leaves, and the trees seemed to bend and give them a blessing. Far away the dreamy chimes rang out and reached them from the cathedral spire, but all their world was one of content. Storms might come into it again, and doubtless would, but with Richard beside her no storm could ever again touch Elinor as closely as in the past.

To her parents and her young brother and sister

the family fortunes had brought a sense of peace and goodwill. But to Elinor the broad acres and the gold were nothing compared to Richard's love, which had been given to her at Jessamine Cottage.

A long time they sat together in the wood, and then turned their lagging steps homeward.

"Lanes were made for people who love each other," said Richard, as they walked along the green ways.

"Yes—and yet I have seen some blissfully happy people in London parks," returned Elinor. "I have felt that I was intruding upon them and I have wondered—if I—would ever be so happy."

"And are you?" Richard bent to kiss her.

"Oh! Richard, it isn't the lanes or the parks that make the difference. It's just—why, it's you."

"You and I together, all the way—and the way doesn't matter very much, does it?" asked Richard.

"Of course it doesn't, and that is what made Bloomsbury happy to mother. I understand all about it now."

"So do I," agreed Richard. "Oh, sweetheart, isn't it heavenly to be in love! I'm so sorry for uncle, he is so terribly old."

"But we shall be old some day. You don't think all the romance will be gone?" And a shadow from the future lay lightly across the girl's brow.

"I'm quite sure it won't. Uncle's horizon is full of romance, and ours will be closer than his, because we shall have had each other." And hand in hand like children they went home to Jessamine Cottage.

It was the same evening that, all a-flutter with the happening of the afternoon, Hannah went across to the Upland Farm for butter. It was nearly dark

when she came out again after a crack of talk with the farmer's wife, and she started when she found that Dick Raven was waiting for her at the gate of the field.

"What are you doing here?" she asked him sharply. "You fair dog my footsteps, that you do."

"It's a fine night," remarked Mr. Raven, unperturbed. "And my work's done. You wouldn't deny a poor man a stroll when his cottage is that lonesome."

"I should ha' thought you'd strolled far enough after your cows," said Hannah, but her voice was mollified. She could not long be out of temper after recent events.

"So you would, but as I've told you before, cows is poor company." Hannah made no reply, but walked on quickly, until Dick spoke again.

"What's your hurry, Hannah?" he asked.

"Hurry, man," said Hannah. "Haven't I got master's supper to get, to say nothing of company! There's a big houseful at the Cottage now."

"It's not near supper-time, and they wouldn't find fault with Hannah Snell, choose what she did. And that smart as you are to-night, Hannah. Isn't that a sprig of geranium in your hat?"

Hannah laughed somewhat consciously. "I believe it is," she said. "More foolish me, but Miss Elinor was throwing it away t'other day and I begged it. Seems to me our family fortunes call for a sprig of something gay and cheery in your bonnet.'

"Right," agreed Dick. "And in your heart and all. There's a many times as I've thought that our friendship—yours and mine—was like a row of geraniums. You may leave 'em without water, and

take no notice of 'em, and yet as long as frost doesn't touch 'em, geraniums 'll flourish. They are faithful flowers as well as cheery ones."

"Ay, there's something in what ye say, Dick."

"Well, I say this an' all," went on Dick, growing bolder. "The proper place for a row of geraniums isn't put away on a dusty shelf. It's in bright red pots, on a cottage window-sill, behind of a muslin blind, or beside a gardin path. And that's where I want to transplant you, Hannah, for you are the geranium for my window-sill, and I won't have no other, no, that I won't. I've waited twenty years for my flowers, and I've never looked the way no others was, and now I want a posy of my own. You might give it me, Hannah. But if you say no this last time, I don't know as I shall ask ye any more. A man has his pride, if he is only a milkman—but doin' well at that."

It was a long speech, but it went home. Hannah heard him to the end, and then said nothing. They were passing a cottage garden in the lonely lane, and growing out of its hedge was a gay little apple-tree. Like the primroses it had mistaken October for April, and dressed itself in apple-blossom. Hannah saw it and it reminded her of herself.

"My! Dick Raven," she said, "do you want me to be like that tree, as at least has the excuse o' being a young one, mistakin' autumn for spring!"

"Some folks has to wait for spring," said Dick. "And it comes at all seasons."

"Ay—you are right there," murmured Hannah.

"Your folks," went on Mr. Raven, "they'll be going to the Hall after a time—I've heard wind of it. Mr.

Tempest's going to have his own rooms, and Master Tony's to be brought up as the heir. How shall you like taking your place there, Hannah, among all them smart maids—you as has been monarch of all you've surveyed like."

Hannah sighed. "I shan't like it at all, Dick," she said.

"Then don't do it!" he cried. "What you love's a cottage, with chickens and geraniums, and somebody as you can lord it over. There's all you want a-waiting. You may lord it over Dick Raven so long as ye both shall live—and he'll be the better pleased."

Hannah's heart was won at last.

"I believe you would, Dick," she said. "I believe you would. There's no fool like the old fool, but I believe I'll do it."

"Ye will?" Dick Raven could scarcely believe his ears, but his heart glowed with a deep and steady flame. He knew that, above all things, Hannah was a woman of her word.

"Yes—I will, Dick. Master and mistress will be a deal in London. They may even have a house there. I couldn't never go back, Dick, no, I couldn't indeed."

"O' course you couldn't," agreed Dick. "It was only your loyal heart made you go before—and now there's no call. It's the country road leads to God and heaven, Hannah, and so I've always found it."

"Ay, lad—and Hannah Snell, she couldn't noways rest in one o' them London graveyards. She must be laid under Nestlecombe yews when her time comes."

"Nestlecombe yews! There's no call to be talking about yews in that way. It's the church, not the churchyard, as we are going to call in. I shall put up the banns afore Christmas, and we'll start a new life together at the New Year. Bless my soul, but the cows 'll take a back seat when you sit t'other side o' my hearth! I'll away and get the parlour furnished, for I've never cared to do it, an' plant a row o' daffodils for spring. My, Hannah, I feel like a lad."

"And you're acting like one. I won't have you makin' me feel like an old ewe dressed lamb fashion. And here we are at Jessamine Cottage. My, I shall be too shamed ever to tell the mistress."

"Then I'll tell her myself——"

"That you won't!"

"Very well, so long as she gets told. Good-night, my lass." And before she could remonstrate Dick had taken Hannah round the waist and given her a resounding kiss at the garden gate.

Her first impulse was to box his ears, but she thought better of it, and ran up the path with a girlish crimson in her cheek, hoping nobody had been looking but the old clipped yews—and yet even in Hannah's heart there was a song that night. She was the centre of somebody's world.

It was in the same dusk that little Pamela, holding Binky fast by his shaggy coat, stood in the silver shadows at the edge of the lake. It was quite a long time since she had been down there by herself, for the days had been so full of delights and actualities, that Pam had somewhat forgotten her dreams.

But this afternoon something else that was wonderful

appeared to have happened in the family, and they had all forgotten her. She always spent Saturday with her grandmother now, and after tea she and Binky had run out by themselves and down to the edge of the lake.

Only one more thing was wanting now to make everything just as it should be at Nestlecombe. The family ship had come home laden with treasure and good fortune. It was no longer the little fishing-vessel that Elinor used to talk about. It was a great and gallant argosy that had come out of the land of dreams. But the silver barge? Pam had come down to the edge of the lake to-night to see if the barge had come back.

She looked back at the long row of lights in the front of the Hall where there used to be such solitary ones. Then she glanced towards the ruined tower, dark and deserted, which always sent a shiver up and down her back.

"The old witch man's not there, Binky," she said, "and I'm rather glad. Perhaps if the silver barge came back, he would come too."

Binky only barked. Life had become very gay to him, with a whole park to scamper over and unlimited rabbits to chase. He did not mind very much whether the barge came home or not.

Pamela stood up very straight and peered into the dusk. The sun had gone down behind the western downs, but had left behind a streak of crimson and a cloud of pearl. The little maid shaded her eyes, and looked into the sky where it was reflected in the water. And there to her imaginative little soul it did indeed seem as though a brave barge with silver prow and

silken sails was coming out of the west and steering straight for Nestlecombe Hall.

Pam clapped her hands. "It's coming, Binky," she said. "I shall tell grannie I have seen it. The old rhyme has come true:—

> 'When Devale is forgiven for love's dear sake,
> The silver barge will float on the lake.'"

THE END

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